

THE LISTENING POST

BOOKS BY
GRACE S. RICHMOND

AT THE SOUTH GATE
THE BROWN STUDY
CHERRY SQUARE
A COURT OF INQUIRY
FOURSQUARE
THE INDIFFERENCE OF JULIET
LIGHTS UP
THE LISTENING POST
MRS. RED PEPPER
RED AND BLACK
RED OF THE REDFIELDS
RED PEPPER BURNS
RED PEPPER'S PATIENTS
ROUND THE CORNER IN GAY STREET
RUFUS
THE SECOND VIOLIN
STRAWBERRY ACRES
THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF JUNE
UNDER THE COUNTRY SKY
WITH JULIET IN ENGLAND

The
Listening Post

BY
GRACE S. RICHMOND



A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers

New York

Published by arrangement with Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.



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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE LISTENING POST, ITSELF

WILLIAM BRENNAN—*Chauffeur and houseman. Imposing when necessary, but a regular human being when with the other members of the Post. His mind works busily.*

MARTHA DOWNS—*Accomplished, middle-aged, and bony cook, temperish and shrewd, but reliable and much prized by her employers.*

MOLLY KELLY—*Pretty, romantic, Irish housemaid, who nevertheless knows how to keep men in their place.*

MISS CATESBY—*A nurse. Nurses are obliged to listen. Somebody might die if they didn't. Fortunately she's not communicative, or there would be trouble indeed. There is, anyway.*

MATT MOODY—*A young fiddler, cast up on the shores of Ill Luck. Or so it seems for a time.*

JERROLD CUNNINGHAM—*Brother to Judith, (whom you'll hear of presently). He appears out of the East, bringing bluntly brotherly suggestions. He's soon gone again, but never mind that, since he's shot his bolt.*

DAVE CARPENTER—*Montana ranch manager. Knows his ropes.*

THOSE WHO ARE LISTENED TO.

RAWLEY KENT—*He is away when the story begins, but a good deal of speculation goes on as to where he is. And as to why, with seemingly everything to be desired of good fortune, he is having almost no communication with such a wife as he married five years ago. You should have seen the rotogravures in the Sunday editions, of the pair as they came down the steps of the church. What can have happened to two people who made such a fascinating picture of complete happiness as that?*

JUDITH KENT—*There is no appearance of the deserted wife about her. Nobody in his senses would desert her. Her personal charm——But we won't go into that now. You will find what she is like as we go along.*

DR. LYLE KENNEDY—*He is a high-powered surgeon who, busy as he is, should not be able to find time to pay other than professional visits. But he does.*

BISHOP JAMES CHIPMAN—*He married the Rawley Kents. When we see him he is off duty, relaxed, able to look at things as they are, not entirely as is required of him by Those in Higher Authority. But wherever he is, he's the real thing, whether as cleric or as man.*

ELEANOR THORNE—*A "little dressmaker," though not of the Jenny Wren type. But you should not be too thoroughly deceived by that term. In these*

days even débutantes have an eye out for an amusing and lucrative job.

ARTHUR COLFAX—*Cousin of Judith's. Young college president in a terrible state of mind. He appears and disappears, and his history is merely an interlude, which nevertheless has its bearing on the case.*

MRS. NATALIE VICKERS—*But you must not expect to meet her personally. To hear about her is quite enough. If you saw her you, too, might be a little upset, and we don't want anybody really upset over this story.*

That's all, and too many for us to handle competently. But they forced their way in, and try as we would we couldn't put them out.

THE LISTENING POST

I

The Listening Post getting ready to function again in a city apartment. Flowers everywhere for its lady, but no master of the place about

IT MAY not happen as often as it once did, but the device is still occasionally used. The curtain, rising upon the stage, discovers a butler and a maid flourishing dusters or arranging flowers. These first few minutes may be comparatively unimportant, in point of actual interest, but usually considerable information as to coming characters is divulged. Theatregoers, arriving late, miss this bit of dialogue, but don't care. The real action is to follow.

You are to care. This curtain, rising upon Brennan, houseman and chauffeur; Martha, cook; Molly, personal as well as parlour maid in the handsome apartment, are serious members of the *dramatis personæ*, and what they say is likely to be quite as important as that which anybody else may say. The three constitute, in fact, the chief members of the Listening Post.

They were, this March morning, rushing the final touches throughout the apartment which should give it the welcoming air a home should have when the mistress of it returns from a six weeks' stay in a hospital. Mrs. Rawley Kent had gone one afternoon in a hurry, they had all been worried about her—and her husband away. He had been away for more than two months; the household personnel hadn't understood why he hadn't come back at news of his wife's illness. But they had more or less got over wondering about that. Their theory was that he had gone a long way and maybe couldn't be found. Their concern was now to make his wife as pleased to come home as they were to have her.

She was so lovely! Satisfying to the eye—oh, more than satisfying. Brennan considered her a great beauty. She couldn't be, he was sure, more than twenty-seven, and didn't really look that. She was so appreciative of what he did for her, both in the house and out of it. Her gifts to him were made in such a delicate way—no thrusting a crumpled bill at him with a curt “Thanks very much, Brennan”—the sort of thing he had known in former positions. She was more likely to murmur in her rich, dropped voice: “You are *such* a skilful driver, Brennan

—what should I do without you! Isn't this your birthday or something?" And tuck a small envelope into his hand, containing, invariably, a *new* bill. Funny about little things like that, how you noticed the difference!

As for Molly, young, pretty, Irish—like Brennan—she had been for five years with Mrs. Kent, beginning when she was eighteen; it was her first experience in service. She had begun instantly to adore her beautiful young lady, who seemed hardly older than herself. She still liked nothing better than to brush and dress her mistress's hair; Molly considered it a perfect colour. Chestnut brown, warm in hue, alive, with an ensnaring natural wave in it which was almost a curl. It had never been bobbed, merely kept cut to shoulder length, and so was easy to put up into lines which suited the small head and piquantly attractive face. Mrs. Kent's eyes were brown, with heavy lashes and deeply accented slim eyebrows. She always looked like somebody out of a picture—that was the only way Molly could describe her. Yet she had no lazy languor about her, which wouldn't have suited lively Molly at all. No, an exquisite vivacity was her characteristic; she seemed always to find a zest in life.

Housekeeper-cook Martha was quite as fond of Mrs. Kent as the others, only she wouldn't admit it so frankly. She was forty and exceedingly practical; she wasn't always romancing about life as Molly was. If the order for extra company came at a time which didn't suit her Martha was apt to grouch about it, but she seldom failed to do her best. Now, well rested after the six weeks of respite from elaborate dinner getting, with Mrs. Kent at the hospital and Mr. Kent away nobody knew where, Martha was quite ready to resume her post. She had her own anxieties concerning her master and mistress; something was amiss between them, she was sure.

"She'll be pleased with all these flowers," Molly said, opening the fourth gigantic box which had come that morning from one of the most expensive florists in the city. "The place is full with them now. I'll put these in her own room."

"They're exactly the colour of your cheeks, if you want to know," Brennan observed.

Molly lightly smacked his cheek with the whole glowing armful of them as she passed him—and had to run to avoid getting paid for it. In her pale-gray uniform, crisp little organdie cap and apron, Molly was to Brennan a tanta-

lizing bit of humanity. Linen for the morning, taffeta and sheer silk stockings with tiny buckled slippers for the afternoons . . . Brennan appreciated her. At his last place everybody in service had worn black and white; Brennan preferred gray. It set off her shining red hair, too.

"Come here and help me with these curtains and stop your nonsense," Martha called. She had volunteered her services at putting the apartment right, though Brennan could have done without her. What was the matter with his and Molly's doing it all, he'd like to know?

"We'll get up the curtains. Better go back to your baking," he suggested.

"My baking's my own affair," Martha retorted. "And I'm anxious to see everything done by noon. She might come earlier than expected."

"Four o'clock, they telephoned. That's exactly the time o' day she went to the hospital."

"And nobody knowing whether she'd come back alive," Molly put in. "What I don't see is why there aren't any flowers from Mr. Kent. He must know about all this. And him always sending her tons of 'em."

"Not this last year—only once in a while. She ordered her own flowers. Maybe she thought I didn't notice her 'phoning for 'em. I did no-

tice." Brennan never allowed anything to escape him.

Talking and gossiping about their master and mistress, as always, they all kept at their work without much slacking. It wasn't all idle curiosity. The Rawley Kents had the genuine liking—in Molly's and Martha's case it was strong affection—of their servants. It is by no means a negligible possession.

At half-past three that afternoon Brennan had the deep-hooded, comfortable town car at the door. His spotless livery matched its dark rich hue. Molly, dressed as smart ladies'-maids should be for riding beside equally smart chauffeurs, took her place. The big motor glided noiselessly away, its rear seat bearing half a dozen dark silk cushions and an extra rug or two. Martha, from a window high above, watched them go, then went back to her preparations for her returning mistress's dinner. In her carefully repressed pleasure in the event she had allowed it to flow over into such a little dinner as no hospital could ever provide.

"It'll taste good to her," she had said to the others, "after them soups all just alike they give 'em in them places. Cream of mushroom's her favourite, an' it's what she's goin' to have.

Braised sweetbreads . . . artichokes . . . a tasty little salad . . . maybe she won't care for a sweet. . . . I guess I'll make somethin' light." No doubt but Martha the cook was putting her crusty yet—underneath its crustiness—kindly heart into that welcoming dinner.

On the way to the hospital Brennan and Molly rode with heads up.

"It'll seem like living again to have her back," sighed Molly.

"Maybe she'll look sick still," Brennan suggested.

"She won't. I saw her a week ago, when I took her some things she wanted. Her windows let in afternoon sunshine, and she's been in it all along. She looks most as well as she ever did—and prettier."

"She's pretty, but not any prettier than you," offered Brennan with a sly glance. The traffic was thick, he couldn't be glancing often, but when he did it bit into Molly's consciousness. She always, however, made fun of his compliments. It was the only safe way.

"Go on with you, Billy Brennan! You're the biggest blarnier this side the Stone."

"I'm no blarnier. I never tell a girl she's pretty if I don't mean it."

"But you tell plenty to make up," insinuated Molly.

"What if I do? Girls have to be told somethin' to keep 'em quiet. But you're the queen of 'em all. And if your little nose didn't turn up just a hair you'd be prettier than Mrs. Kent. At that, I like noses to have some life to 'em, not just straight pointin' ahead."

Molly glanced at the clock on the instrument board. "Stop your fooling and step on it," she commanded. "There's a jam at Fifty-ninth, and you've got to go 'round."

Vowing he wouldn't, Brennan turned a corner and went round the jam. It took seven extra minutes, in spite of his skill at making time if only for fifty feet. Then the car drew up at the great white stone building, far uptown. Molly gazed up at it and shivered happily.

"It must be wonderful to be coming out of a hospital, all well," she said. "Lots of 'em go out a door we don't see. It's a big, awful, wonderful place, and it makes my heart beat hard just to look at it."

"It does give you kind of a funny feelin'," agreed Brennan.

With a certain sense of awe, which stopped

their chatter, they sat looking in silence at the door through which Judith Kent was shortly to come back to them, as by a miracle, for there had seemed small hope for her when she had gone in.

II

A competent nurse is expressing herself. She lives ordinarily in rather a hard shell, but can't help putting her head out to-day

THE nurse returned from a reconnoitring expedition into the long hospital corridor.

"Dr. Kennedy's on this floor now, Mrs. Kent. It won't be long, I'm sure. . . . And I hope you won't mind my saying you look wonderful, wonderful, for one who's been here so many weeks."

"You're very comforting, Miss Catesby. I'm fearful my looking wonderful is due to the way you've got me up in all my best gadgets. But even so . . ."

Young Mrs. Kent smiled at the devoted person with a plain, strong face and bobbed ash-coloured hair touched with gray, who was Dr. Kennedy's pet nurse—from the standpoint of efficiency. There were prettier nurses all over the place, and good ones, too. He undoubtedly appreciated them. But when he wanted to make

surer than sure of a case he insisted on having Miss Catesby. She it was who would give nearly her life's blood rather than let things go wrong. In this case it had been for both doctor and patient that she had done her best. And she had succeeded.

Mrs. Kent was going out to-day. Miss Catesby dreaded to have her go.

"You have such beautiful things, Mrs. Kent. It's a pleasure to fix you up. Not that you've seemed to care about looking all dressed up for the doctor, the way so many women do."

"Oh, but of course I must secretly have cared, you know. But I didn't have to take the trouble. You've taken it for me."

"I expect I wanted to do it all the more because you weren't vain about it. I've had patients that would have their rings and their brooches on when their skins were yellow as saffron. I've often wondered what the doctor thought of them."

"He's undoubtedly used to seeing us make every kind of spectacle of ourselves for his benefit," Judith Kent murmured. "Miss Catesby, with all your endeavour this morning to have me quite perfect for Dr. Kennedy's final inspection, you've forgotten one thing. You haven't given

me a handkerchief on which to weep when I say good-bye to him. According to the tales you've told me that's what I'm sure to do."

"My goodness!" Miss Catesby hastily supplied the deficiency—generously, for she put two sheerly fine embroidered wisps of linen beside Mrs. Kent's hand upon the tightly drawn sheet. The patient half reclined upon the bed, not in it, with several starchily fresh pillows behind her.

The silken garment of bird's egg blue which partially enveloped her—neck and arms concealed only by the thinnest of chiffon—slippers to match (Miss Catesby hadn't been able to get over those slippers)—set off her warm colouring most effectively, as Miss Catesby had decided when she herself selected it from among several alluring possibilities.

"Two! Shall I need two, do you think?"

"They mostly do. Women are foolish about their doctors. Not you—you've never acted the way some of them do—most of them, I'd say."

Miss Catesby was a blunt person, which was partly why Mrs. Kent had enjoyed her so much. She had permitted this nearly middle-aged, astute, disillusioned woman who had taken such splendid care of her to say things to her which

she wouldn't have accepted from younger nurses.

"That's something to be thankful for, then. I'm proud of your approval, Miss Catesby. And I hope you'll be present at the closing interview, so that your high opinion of my self-control will continue to the last."

Miss Catesby shook her head. "Dr. Kennedy wouldn't like it. He hasn't any more orders for me, but he's sure to have plenty for you, and he'll want to give 'em just to yourself. All I've got to do now is to dress you in your street clothes and call up your chauffeur. The doctor's going to send you out about four this afternoon.—My goodness, isn't that man *ever* coming? He usually takes you first when he comes down from the fifth."

She put her head out of the door again, drew it back.

"He's got a crowd around him—friends of patients. They bother the life out of him. I expect he wants to get a clear field for you. He'll likely stay in here a good while—for him—this time, Mrs. Kent."

"That will be very nice. Even though it's a little early, should we serve tea for him, do you think, Miss Catesby?"

"I wonder," said Miss Catesby, with a clear look at her nearly ex-patient, "what you're like, at home. Of course you're one of those women who do 'serve tea'!"

"You must come and see what I'm like at home," said Judith Kent, with her friendly smile. "You wouldn't refuse the tea, would you?"

"I might. I like coffee myself—boosts you up better when you're tired. There—that's his step. Now I'll just slip out, Mrs. Kent. And that isn't saying I wouldn't like to stay."

"Do stay. Why not?"

"He wouldn't——" The door opened, a familiar figure appeared in the doorway. Miss Catesby stood up, looking suddenly prim and professional. Mrs. Kent turned her brown-eyed gaze toward her surgeon. He came in and stood at the foot of the bed, surveying his patient. Then he glanced toward the nurse and nodded.

"That's my walking papers," said Miss Catesby to Mrs. Kent. "You see?"

"I see. But why? Mayn't Miss Catesby stay to the last, Dr. Kennedy?"

"For her impertinence in speaking like that to the attending physician she must go." Dr. Kennedy's smile at Miss Catesby proved her

what she was, a privileged person. Not another nurse in the hospital would have been permitted so to address him. Her brusqueness, under which she almost perfectly concealed her attachment to him, was what endeared her to him. Against her, at least, he would never have to take precautionary measures. Bachelor members of hospital staffs have their own peculiar troubles.

Miss Catesby went out, with one last loyal yet envious look behind. Not in years—indeed, never, she thought—had she had a patient like Mrs. Kent. In that heavenly green-blue thing of silk and chiffon, with her rich chestnut hair brushed straight back from her forehead leaving an exquisitely curving line, her warmly lighted brown eyes with their black brows and lashes, her enchanting mouth, Judith Kent was to Sarah Catesby the dream of what she herself, austere though she outwardly seemed, would have liked to be. She had had rich and attractive patients before, who had rewarded her lavishly when they left. But they had not been like Mrs. Kent. What made the difference was that from the very first Mrs. Kent had treated her nurse as though she knew that behind the plain face, the candid speech, the whole capable personality, existed another woman, whose life meant

something to her besides arduous, unending service in a hospital.

Judith Kent had been brave, she had been considerate, she had often been amusing, even when she was in pain. Miss Catesby, cynical with long experience, had time and again said to herself that she didn't know they came like young Mrs. Kent. It wasn't strange that Dr. Kennedy had given her a good bit of extra attention. Never once had his patient acted silly about him—she wouldn't act silly now, Miss Catesby knew, even at the parting. She might be grateful to him—she must be—but she wouldn't kiss his hand. That, of course, was why Dr. Kennedy liked her. Miss Catesby wondered a little whether Dr. Kennedy mightn't want to kiss Mrs. Kent's hand, but she decided that he wouldn't do it. The hand wore a wonderful, deep-gemmed wedding ring, and no other jewels whatever. Miss Catesby understood that Mr. Kent was far away somewhere, and that his wife had not let him know of her illness.

Miss Catesby had puzzled her brain a good deal over the matter, but could get no light, and she would not discuss her patient with the other nurses, just because they were so curious about

her. One out of a thousand was this nurse from Maine, and her reticence naturally annoyed the other nurses very much. They were only human; of course they wanted to know everything that was interesting about their patients.

III

Differences of opinion between a capable surgeon and his interesting but self-willed patient, about to leave his hospital and intending very thoroughly to be done with it

ON THE inside of the closed door Dr. Kennedy drew up the chair placed for him and looked his patient in her unflinching eyes. His own were even steadier.

"I want a good talk with you," he said.

"Of course. Miss Catesby warned me. Do fire away. Though I promise you I may not be able to stick to every word of warning you may give me."

"That's precisely what I'm afraid of. But I want to tell you, very firmly, that you must, for a considerable time."

"Lay down the law, then. I'll listen. But—be easy on me! I can't play convalescent very long."

"I won't ask you to. You'll soon be fairly strong again. But the thing I want now is to have you promise me that you'll resign from every league, board, committee, or what not, on which you

have a responsible position. And to cut out social and speaking engagements, late hours, and all that."

She sat up nearly straight, looking at him with amazement. "For the love of heaven, Dr. Kennedy, *why?*"

"Because you need a complete change for at least a year in your mode of existence. If you don't make it, you'll be, in a year or two more, one of those overstrung, hypersensitive female dervishes who can't stop whirling. And that price is too high for you to pay."

"What—utter nonsense! I never really lived till I began to be of some use."

"How old are you—whether or not you mind telling?"

"I shall be," replied Judith Kent, without hesitation, "twenty-seven years old on the twentieth of June. And you ask me to live the life of a chronic invalid!"

"Not at all!"

The two regarded each other searchingly. Judith saw the man who had brought her through difficult days, saved her life to her, given her back a whole body, restored to her peace of mind, in so far as he was able. He didn't look like such a miracle worker. He was a middle-

aged man possessing rather notably good features, but he was not an Apollo, and the drawing power he had for his patients and the staff lay in subtle qualities of mind and manner rather than in a captivating personality. People grew to like him, they were not irresistibly drawn to him at first sight. But once having fallen under his spell—for spell it strangely seemed to be, in spite of no effort on his part to make it one—they seldom fell away again. Rather they came to regard Dr. Kennedy's friendship as something worth any effort to acquire. Fewer people than was known ever did acquire it, in its fullness, in spite of the well-understood fact that the skilful surgeon was everybody's friend—while under his care.

Lyle Kennedy, watching his patient, saw something very precious to human society which must be preserved at all costs. This young and lovely woman, who had been putting her whole self into the life of her social set and her own civic and charitable activities as well, keeping long, late hours, wearing down her splendid vitality to the breaking-point because she had supposed it to be inexhaustible, couldn't be released to go her arduous and exciting way as of old, for lack of a restraining hand. Thanks to his trained work

upon her, to Miss Catesby's unfailing care, she was going out nominally well. But he knew that the old ceaseless round was not for her if she would keep that youth and charm undimmed. He was determined that she should heed his counsel.

"Not at all the life of an invalid? To be simply out of everything? Why, it wouldn't be living at all."

"I don't ask you to be out of everything. All I ask is that you keep out of the thick of the fray."

"The thick of the fray is the only place where I want to be. Let me ask you, Dr. Kennedy: If you were given your choice—five years more of such surgery as you do, every minute of your life full to brimming—and then out of it; or stop to-day and begin the terrible job of taking care of yourself—which would you choose?"

"Do you think that's a fair question?"

"Absolutely fair. Except that—of course—there's no comparing such work as yours and the sort of thing I've been so busy about. But I do dare to think I've been of use. Mayn't I please think that?"

"You've been of the greatest possible use—nobody could dispute it. And as I see it you

may continue to be of use—may keep your life full. Only—not after your former pattern.”

“How, then? I don’t know any other that would satisfy me.”

Lyle Kennedy rose from his chair, thrust his hands into his pockets, and paced away from the bedside the length of the fair-sized room—one of the largest private rooms in the hospital, which he hadn’t hesitated to insist upon his patient’s occupying because she could perfectly well afford it, and it meant sunlight and air and a commanding view off over the great city. He stopped by the window and stood looking out over the roof-tops toward the higher towers and turrets stretching far downtown. Judith Kent watched him, wondering what he might be turning over in his mind and how he would manage to present to her whatever it might be. Lines and boundaries, in any case, to her who had known none such! She wouldn’t have them.

But when he came back to her again his smile was disarming. He took his seat once more facing her.

“In about a week from now,” he said, “when you are that much stronger, will you let me come after you and take you on a little expedition?”

"It sounds innocent," she admitted. "But I'm suspicious of you. Promise me it's not a sanitarium, nor springs, nor a health resort of any kind."

"It's nothing of the sort."

"What I've planned to do, Dr. Kennedy, as soon as you thought me fit, is to go back to one of my favourite haunts in England and spend the summer with a friend I'm very fond of. Then—coming back to the city in the fall—to take up my work again and carry it along on perhaps—to please you—somewhat less strenuous lines than before. But I must be busy—I must. I wish you could see it. I can no more do without full hours than you can. Please believe that, and don't try to condemn me to a restricted life. What's the use? Let me live it out—and go—if that's the only alternative."

"My dear Mrs. Kent"—he leaned forward, in his earnestness, fixing her with his intent gaze—"I wish you could trust me. You seem to have trusted me—through this whole time in the hospital. But now that you're going home you're virtually dismissing me and my counsels. It's a poor doctor who doesn't care what happens to his patient after the hospital doors open to let her out."

"And of course you couldn't be that sort, Dr. Kennedy. Very well, I'll continue to trust you. And I'll be delighted to have you take me on that little expedition—if you can actually make time for it."

"I can and will. All right, it's a bargain. And if you're going with me on that I'll spare you any more discussion now. I want to see you walk across this room, please, and then I'll be off."

He held out his hand. She took it and slipped from the high bed to her feet. Standing beside him her head came not much above his shoulder. She held herself erect and walked away from him the length of the room, a graceful slender figure, her head up, her greenish-blue draperies floating about her. As she returned to him, smiling, she might have been a spirited young hostess advancing to meet a guest. In every line of her lay the evidence of her previous history—that of a youthful leader of poise and power. No wonder, he thought, that she couldn't give all that up for—as she considered it—the hateful job of merely taking care of herself. He couldn't blame her.

He had never known her personally before she had been sent to him at the hospital by a certain noted specialist. But he had often seen

her name, as well as her photograph, in connection with important public events. The laying of corner stones, the assembling of conventions—she was always the youngest and fairest in the group upon any platform—the bestowing of honours for accomplishment in various fields, especially that of the development of the arts among young foreigners. Yes, hers had thus far been a full life. It was now his self-assumed task to take care that it was somehow kept full, and yet that she didn't sacrifice its high powers for the sake of some cause for which they were too valuable to be sacrificed.

"That's all I could ask," he commented, on the demonstration he had requested. "Perfect coördination, apparent ease of motion, and a steady head. All right, thank you. You've been a splendid patient, and if I've still to deal with some rebellion—well—we'll try to work that out later."

He took himself away. He exchanged a few words with Miss Catesby, outside the door, then the nurse returned to the room.

Judith had dropped into the well-cushioned armchair in which she was now permitted to sit for a part of each day. In her lap lay an unused handkerchief,

"Well, of all the short visits," began Miss Catesby. She eyed the handkerchief. "But where's the other?"

Mrs. Kent pointed toward the bed. Her eyes were glittering, but not with tears.

"Well! I'll say you're the first patient Dr. Kennedy ever had that he'd done as much for as he has for you that didn't have a little wopsed-up wet ball in her hand when she'd said good-bye to him."

"Oh, come, Miss Catesby! Do you make us out all so emotional as that? Can't one show appreciation without tears? Besides, if I'm going to cry over saying good-bye to anybody it should be you, who have taken such marvellous care of me."

"Hm-n. I guess we won't have any tears over that—not after the way I've domineered and bossed you. You'll be glad to be rid of me."

"Not I. You've been much better for me than some gentle, demonstratively sympathetic person, and you know that yourself. Will you come and see me sometime when you're off duty?"

"I never was one to follow up a patient because they happened to be grateful to me. I just turn my mind to the next one and try to do my duty."

Miss Catesby busied herself in a clothespress following this stern speech. Judith sat looking out of the window, thinking about her nurse. What pains they both were taking, this morning, she thought, to cover up their real feeling. She read Sarah Catesby like a book, quite as she was accustomed to read her fellow women.

Two hours later, dressed for her departure and looking the perfect type of the world she came from, restrainedly elegant, exquisite, with only a slight pallor to suggest the weeks she had spent in the hospital, she went out. Miss Catesby descended with her to the entrance which had not become an exit. Outside stood a luxurious-looking motor done in a deep maroon colour, with a chauffeur waiting beside it. A pretty young woman, very trim and professional, came quickly out of the motor to meet them. Maid and man took charge of the slight luggage Mrs. Kent was bringing away with her. Their faces were bright with pleasure at sight of their mistress, and the exchange of greetings between the three indicated to Miss Catesby that, quite as she had known, wherever Mrs. Kent went she was sure to be the centre of regard. And why not? Though she wouldn't have owned it, even to herself, Miss Catesby was feel-

ing hollower than she could remember ever feeling before at parting from a patient. She told herself, as she watched Mrs. Kent sink back into the soft comfort of her car, that she herself was a fool for minding. She would be forgotten before the car turned the corner. What was a nurse, like herself?

Judith Kent leaned forward, holding out her hand. There was no gift in it—she had known that should come later; Miss Catesby wouldn't want money pressed into her hand at parting.

"Good-bye, kind Miss Catesby." The black-lashed brown eyes looked into the steel-gray ones which were actually blinking slightly. "From now on, if I may, I'm counting you as one of the best friends I have. Please don't forget me, will you?"

"I guess not," responded Miss Catesby gruffly. "I don't have much time for remembering patients, but—I probably won't forget you. Take care of yourself, and don't overdo."

The shining dark motor rolled smoothly away.

IV

A home-coming. But is the place quite home, in spite of all the Listening Post can do? It seems to lack something. Yet why should it? It is all as decreed

"OH, BUT it's good to be home. And to see you all. How you've made everything shine! I don't believe anybody ever had such nice people to look after one."

This was the way she did it! She was sitting in a deep chair in the charmingly appointed living room, with a sea-coal fire glowing near by, flowers everywhere, and her three servants standing smiling before her. She never called them servants, hardly in her thoughts; they were much too interesting to her for that. "Persons"—that was a better word for Martha Downs, Molly Kelly, and William Brennan.

"Just let me sit here a minute, Molly," Judith had said, "before I go to rest for a while before dinner—as my autocratic nurse ordered. I want to look at everything, including you three."

Molly had taken away her sable coat, her hat and gloves, and left her in the comfortable

chair. Judith began with Martha, whose broad face wore a beaming smile.

"You can't imagine," she said gaily, "how I used to wish my trays could be sent up by you! How well you're looking, Martha! Everything must be all right at home. Your father better?"

"He's nearly well, Mrs. Kent. It's the nourishin' food you had me send him that's done it. I'm afraid you won't find the bills for the kitchen much lighter than as if you was here."

"I didn't want them lighter, with your family in such hard luck. Did Henry get the place he wanted?"

"Three weeks ago, thanks to your letter to the boss before you went to the hospital. How you ever found time——"

"Time?" Judith laughed. "I had all the time in the world, and plenty left over. . . . Molly, how pretty you look!—What have you been doing to your hair, child? Not letting anybody put—er—henna on it?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Kent! I wouldn't do that—knowing how you'd hate it."

"She wouldn't be the only one that'd hate it," Brennan interpolated. "She hasn't done a thing to it, Mrs. Kent. I think maybe you've just been forgettin' the colour of it."

"I believe I have. My nurse had hair the colour of ashes, brown grown gray early. But she was a splendid person. Molly's lovely curls must look so bright to me because of the ashes I've watched so long. . . . And you, Brennan—you look remarkably well, too. Haven't you put on a little weight?"

"Shouldn't wonder, madam. And me with so little to do. But I exercise at the gym three nights a week, so I don't think it can be much."

"Probably not. Just enough to be becoming. You all seem so fine and fresh after my seeing so many ill people."

"In your room, ma'am?" Martha asked incredulously.

"Oh, no. But my door would be left open a minute, sometimes, and I would see patients being wheeled along the corridor. Or I would hear them—or about them. . . . That didn't matter—only it's good to be at home. . . . Thank you all for giving me such a pleasant welcome."

That meant dismissal, of course, for Martha and Brennan, but they took her smile with them. Molly hovered, it was her privilege.

Afterward they all compared notes.

"Pretty near herself again, I'd say," offered Brennan, opening another box of flowers, just

arrived. Roses, again. Did her friends want to smother her in roses? He'd bet she'd like a big bunch of yellow calendulas or sweet peas. They didn't cost enough, he supposed, for her friends to consider them worth sending.

Martha shook her head. "There's a look in her eyes. I call it the hospital look—as if she'd been through a plenty. But maybe it's because *he* ain't here."

"I wouldn't have believed he wouldn't be," Molly mused. "I wish we knew where he was."

"You'd better ask her," suggested Brennan cynically. "What the devil shall I put these in? I've used up every vase and bowl in the place."

Molly brought out a florist's basket, which had been put away by herself when its contents had withered, because she fancied it.

"She don't like baskets," she said, "but I guess you'll have to use this. She likes to see their stems."

"Don't I know that? They all have their notions."

"And her fewer than most," Molly came back quickly.

Brennan caught her arm as she brought him the basket.

"Here—I'll tuck one behind your ear." He

picked out a salmon-coloured Lady Lucinda, broke the stem off short, and in spite of her protesting laughter fastened the gay bloom in her thick bright hair.

"Dare you to wear it in," he challenged her.

"I'll take the dare. She's so glad to be back she won't mind."

"Give me a kiss for it."

He got a light slap instead—as he had known he would.

"Just for that . . ." He reached for the rose. She eluded him and vanished from the room. Two minutes later she was back—without the rose.

"Ah—didn't dare, after all, eh?"

"No use being impudent. I put it in my own room. It's bad enough to be stealing it from her. I'll keep it pressed in a book as a keepsake from you, Billy Brennan."

"Yes, you will!"

"Maybe I will, at that."

She was a tantalizing young person. He never knew how he stood with her. He tried again for the kiss, but didn't get it. But he managed to avoid another slap. She was in high spirits tonight. They were all in high spirits. Mrs. Rawley Kent was back.

She hadn't been back an hour before the hall boy sent up the last mail of the day. Molly, Martha, and Brennan all saw it before it reached Mrs. Kent. They had been looking out for this particular letter for many weeks and had about given up hoping it would ever come. Brennan took it in to his lady.

She received it without a sign of especially welcoming it. "Thank you, Brennan." That was the way, thought Brennan, with people like the Kents. They never let you see how they were feeling. This was the first letter from her husband she had had in the two months he had been gone. Her mail had continued to come to the house during the weeks she had been in the hospital, and had accumulated there, a great pile which she hadn't yet touched. One of her doctor's orders had been that she was to receive no letters while she was under his care. The Listening Post had had eyes like hawks for letters from Mr. Rawley Kent. Yes, this was the first. Funny how she could keep from giving it away how she felt about getting it, at last! This seemed amazing to Billy Brennan. Take Molly, now—wouldn't she have given a little scream, or something, if she'd had a letter from somebody she

cared about and hadn't heard from for too long a time? But there it was. *Did* Mrs. Kent care?

When Judith was alone again by the fire she opened the letter.

Silver Top Ranch, Montana
March 30th.

DEAR JUDITH:

As I write that form of address it strikes me that it's the first time I ever placed it at the head of a letter to you. Somehow it gives me an even stranger feeling than any I have yet had about this whole business. Or perhaps it's only that it seems to sum it all up in a nutshell. Yes, I think that's it.

The journey out to California was commonplace. I talked with nobody—had no mind to talk. I felt somewhat as I did, back in 1914, when as a young and very raw Lieutenant I sailed with my outfit for France. I seemed to have left everything behind, to have made a complete break with the past and to be confronting an absolutely unknown future. There was a peculiar numbness about it—and dumbness. But I'm not

going to begin attempting to analyze myself or my feelings for your benefit. I'm afraid it doesn't matter much to you how I feel. And doubtless I shall wake up and get into action, now, as I did then.

I have just recently come back here—luckily for me spring came out earlier than usual this year. I found the Langhorne ranch house waiting, much as I remembered it. I was sure I should want to stay in it, unless it had deteriorated more than I expected. I found, at first sight of it, that it had the old fascination for me. Poor Langhorne put a lot of money and imagination into building it, and I couldn't do better if I built for myself. It isn't as isolated as it was when I stayed with him the last time, for a fortnight seven years ago. Dude ranches have sprung up since then; there's one not more than five miles away. But this place still seems alone; it includes enough acres so that nobody can buy within sight of the big cabin. The splendid reaches across the valley, the towering mountain, the winding river—they can't be taken away from me. If I should decide to buy it the business will be put through for me quickly. Owning the place would give me a sense of permanence, no matter how far from it I might take the fancy to roam.

I need a sense of permanence just now, when everything in my life seems to have shifted.

I have a good companion in Dave, my young manager. He's been employed over on one of the dude ranches but hated it more and more. He was engaged for his picturesque looks and his cleverness at wrangling the visitors. I stopped over a day or two at that place—it was getting ready for the summer influx—while I looked over the ground. He took me over to Langhorne's on horseback, and when he found I meant to stay and possibly ultimately to buy the place, he immediately offered himself in any capacity in which I might want to use him.

"Anything to get away from the dames that'll be comin' later over there," he said. And then added with caution, "Expectin' any o' them?" I assured him that the ranch, if I remained in it, would be dedicated to bachelor freedom. "That's me," he said. "And I can cook, if I have to. But I expect you'll want an all-around good cook, and I can get you one. Bumpy's the man for you. He can toss a flapjack or fry you venison the best of any man I ever come across."

I promptly engaged Bumpy, and we are settled in, Dave, Bumpy, and I. Dave will get

me a string of horses, and other necessities. Later I may develop some sort of business—horse or sheep raising. I have sent for a lot of the things a fellow of my too-luxurious tastes can't think of doing without, though I fancy Dave is a trifle scornful of an Easterner who cares too much about the mattress he sleeps on, the books he wants all over the place, or the radio which will bring the world in to him. But as I have owned that I'm not pretending to be a Westerner, he accepts me—and doesn't mind listening in himself at certain hours. As for me, I am already fond of the boy, who is really a man of far more virility and initiative than I. Sometimes, by the way, I curse the day my father left me, at twenty-seven, all his money. As I look at Dave I'd gladly exchange fortunes with him and his lusty youth. He makes me, at thirty-five, feel old.

As I read this letter over it sounds to me weak and womanish. (Forgive those adjectives.) Doubtless by the time I write again I shall have stiffened up under the influence of this bracing air and the sound of Dave's contemptuous "Thanks, but that's too damned soft for me," when I offered him one of the ranch's guest rooms. He prefers the bunkhouse

at present. If it comes to a case of my softening him or his hardening me, I prefer the latter.

I hadn't meant to write so long a letter, for I thought you wouldn't care for it. But we agreed—you reluctantly—that we wouldn't let actual silence fall between us. I thought I was proud, Judith. I always have been proud. I find it difficult to keep that attitude with you. But this year of separation—which I fully realize may be extended indefinitely—isn't of my seeking, as you well know. I mean to keep myself in your mind by this means. If the day comes when you say, "Don't write any more"—and I'm sure you mean it—I'll accept it. But it's not fair to begin that way, is it? So keep your promise, please, and let me know, as often as you will, what you are doing.

Yours,

RAWLEY.

She sat for a long time thinking. Should she answer at once? No, not too soon. He had waited, according to their agreement, for two full months before writing. She wouldn't respond just yet, though she felt a curious inclination to do so. That was old habit, probably. The sight of the familiar handwriting had

brought back vivid memories of the time when a week's separation had meant daily letters. Perhaps, if they hadn't begun so passionately, the flame wouldn't have died down so soon. Anyhow—she was glad to know he was comfortably established. Montana. . . . It was hard to imagine Rawley, with his fastidious tastes, comfortable in Montana. Somehow he would have seemed nearer if he had written her that he had found a charming apartment in Paris! She knew Paris, could imagine his being contented there. But—Montana! She knew far more about Europe than about America. She thought of Montana as mostly a wild and barbarous country, in which this ranch house of which her husband wrote must be a mere tiny oasis in a desert.

She put the letter away. In about a month she would answer it.

V

The capable surgeon attempts to manage a woman—outside of his hospital. He seems to be having no luck at it.

He should have brought an anæsthetic

IT WAS two weeks later—the fifteenth of April, to be exact—that Dr. Lyle Kennedy came, by appointment, to take Judith Kent on the “little expedition” he had planned for her.

She had made good use of the interval. She had obeyed orders to the letter as concerned the disposal of her time. She had received a few friends, taken daily drives, well-chosen food, and mild, gradually increasing exercise. The only thing she hadn’t done was to resign from those boards and committees. Nobody expected her to become active upon them, anyway, she knew, until considerable time should have passed.

“Just get your health perfectly restored, my dear,” said other energetic members of those organizations and working bodies, calling upon her in her apartment or writing notes to her, “and then we’ll talk business again. Meanwhile,

it's impossible to tell you how terribly we miss you."

"Not half as much as I miss you," she had responded, and recognized an odd sense of heavy loss at each fresh response. As yet she was not in the least sure that she intended to obey those strictures of Dr. Kennedy. She would be sensible and take care to be well up to it before she defied him. But after that—— Certain lines of Louise Imogen Guiney's which had taken strange hold of her imagination long ago sang often in her ears:

A short life in the saddle, Lord,
Not long life by the fire. . . .

In the saddle! That was the place to be. What if she got thrown? She would at least have known the thrills of many a leap over hurdle and dash through field. It was worth it!

Kennedy came for her in the one of the two motors he used when he preferred to drive himself. It was powerful and comfortable, though not closed. He had consulted the weather reports—they were favourable, and the air was balmy.

"This won't be too breezy for you?" he asked, as he put her in. "You look so well, and I was sure you like the open air."

"I am well—amazingly well. And I love the open air. What a perfect April day! I'm so tired of driving about the Park or up the Boulevard. I'm sure you're taking me to the country. It's the one splendid thing a doctor can do for a convalescent."

"You do like the country, then?"

"Who doesn't? I couldn't actually live in it long, but I like to visit it every so often. And in April!"

Around a curve in the road thirty miles out from town the sea came into view, a sparkling azure sea under the almost cloudless April sky. A row of low-lying houses crouched near the water's edge, a few larger, the others much smaller, one or two mere dots in the distance.

"Wild Gull Cove," said Kennedy, pointing. "Happen to know it?"

"I didn't know it even existed."

"I thought you mightn't. Few do, and those few like it for its rather unexpected remoteness. Around the bend stands a great hotel—a mile away. There's nothing nearer, nor will be, if those of us who care about it can control it."

"You have property here, then?"

"The very smallest house you see—nothing but a shack—though it will show up as of quite

enough size for an old bachelor to run away to now and then. We'll go by it—and the rest."

He drove along the winding shore road, past a row of closed attractive houses of cottage size, with windows boarded. Past his own, whose windows, few and small, were not boarded. Judith saw that he looked toward it as though it meant something to him.

"Mostly big rough fireplace with a couple of bunks and a place to cook in. It puts the breath of life back into me to stay here only for an hour," he said. "Even in the dead of winter the fit sometimes seizes me to run out and spend a night. With a fire roaring and some warm blankets it doesn't matter how the storm rages—if I can get my car through it at all."

"It sounds jolly."

"It *is* jolly. Ever tried that kind of thing?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not. I'm a conventional person and go round in grooves."

"Yes, I can imagine your grooves, I think. They're really race-tracks, with the curves banked for speed. Big country places of well-known people, as a guest; luxurious hotels when you travel. Servants—porters . . ."

She laughed. "The surgeon turns diagnostician. You think I'm all for luxury and what's

called Society—with a big S. You imagine I don't know a squirrel track when I see it. I've really noted some most inviting squirrel tracks but haven't had time to follow them up. But I assure you they did look interesting."

"Only—the tiger and elephant trails were more exciting. Granted. Well, I'm taking you along a squirrel track right now, but it leads to a fairly imposing tree. How do you like the look of *that* house?"

It stood upon a cliff, and a group of scraggy pines had hidden it from her view. A long flight of steps led up to it from the beach below. The house was long, low, gray-shingled, with plenty of shrubbery about it, a desirable place and by all odds the one which stood out for pleasant dignity above its neighbours.

"It looks very nice indeed. Have you friends here?"

He was drawing up before the house, about which a white picket fence kept guard, with a gateway over which an as yet bare vine promised leafage later.

"I did have highly valued friends here, and have become very fond of the place. But it's empty now, and is to be rented or sold, preferably sold. Dick Bassett died abroad last winter,

and his widow writes me asking me to place the house in the hands of an agent. Before doing that, I thought you might like to see it. I have the key. Will you go in and look it over? The Bassetts put a lot of time and thought on furnishing it as a summer home—I think it may interest you to see some of their ideas.”

She already knew what Lyle Kennedy was after, of course. He wanted to put her down here by the lonely sea, take her so completely out of the sweep and urge of life, for nobody knew how long, that she should feel herself to be in a mere backwater, though the whole ocean surged in its tides before her door. She wouldn't consider it—not for a moment. She would look the house over, as he suggested, she didn't mind that. Houses always fascinated her, even though, as a time-saving device, she considered a well-planned apartment in the midst of a city by far the more desirable as a home. She had never cared to own a summer place; her summers for as far back as she could recall had been spent abroad.

She went in with a delicate nose alert for musty smells. But these quickly vanished as Kennedy threw open windows and shutters, and the April sunshine came flooding into the great living room which stretched all the way across the front

of the house, its long rows of windows seeming to let in the whole ocean view. She looked about her.

"It's a charming room," she acknowledged.

"Isn't it? I've smoked many a pipe lounging in that long window seat or in front of that fireplace. Dick Bassett picked up every stone for that himself and oversaw the mason who placed them. I may be a prejudiced observer—probably am, because of my liking for my friends the Bassetts—but it seems to me I never knew a more livable room. The rest of the house will bear inspection, too."

He led her over it. The bedrooms upstairs were large and airy, furnished in the best of taste, suggestive of comfort and rest. The baths were above reproach, appointed by a fastidious owner. The kitchen was bright with tile and nickel; the china cupboards were filled with gay patterns of English porcelain.

"The whole house is delightful—I don't blame you for liking it," Judith admitted as they came back to the sunshiny living room. "All these lovely old pieces of furniture make the rooms a joy to the eye. I should think you or the agent would have little trouble in renting it—or selling it."

"It will go very quickly, I'm sure. It's unusual to have a place offered so fully and so beautifully furnished. Mary Bassett is willing to sell it all as it is—with a short list of reservations—provided, she says, a customer is found who will appreciate the house and its furnishings. 'Can't you find somebody who will really care for our things as Dick and I cared,' she writes, 'in which case it wouldn't be so hard to let it go.'"

"She doesn't feel she can ever come back?"

"She is positive she can't. She wants to live abroad now, the year round, and it's probably best she should. The Bassetts made their headquarters in London—she has more close friends there than here."

"One can't blame her."

"Mrs. Kent"—Dr. Kennedy now came out with what she had been expecting to hear—"wouldn't you like to rent the place for the summer, with the chance to buy it later, if we could get Mrs. Bassett to give you time to decide in—as I think we could? It's precisely the sort of home I'd like to see you in, for the present, at least. I won't try to mortgage your future, but the summer in the sea air would be great for you."

"And what could I possibly do with myself,

when I'd read for two or three hours out of the day, and taken a stroll on the sands—perhaps a dip in the sea? Go for a drive along the coast, I suppose. Invite a friend down for the weekend—only one, lest I tire myself! Dr. Kennedy, I might stand it for a week. Just one week! Then—I'd be frantic to get away.”

“If you feel like that,” replied her surgeon, physician, and new friend, “it simply shows what a life of overtension you’ve led and how you need to relax.”

“And what you can’t understand, dear sir, is that if you make me relax to that degree you can’t tighten me again so that I’ll be worth anything. I should just go to pieces utterly.”

“I don’t believe it.” His tone was stubborn. “You’d find things to do right here.”

“For instance?”

“Just below you, your next neighbour, lives a Catholic priest, a neighbour by no means negligible. I’m very fond of him.”

“I’d be sending for him to give me extreme unction within a month.”

“He has,” continued Lyle Kennedy imperturbably, “so bad a case of angina that he couldn’t come up your flight of steps without risking his life. But that makes no difference to

the fact that Father O'Flynn is one of the jolliest, most charming, best educated men I've ever known. That strong-armed chauffeur of yours could easily bring him in his arms up to spend an evening with you. He used to be a heavy man, but he's pitifully lighter now, naturally. And he's barely forty. He's one of my best friends."

He told her of her other neighbours. It was not an aristocratic summer resort, the people who would occupy the cottages later were all of limited means. But among them were several who were to be counted upon as desirable acquaintances: two or three college faculty men, a well-known novelist of seafaring tastes, a young musician. Dr. Kennedy considered it a little summer community worth knowing, and though it included a few not so attractive as possible friends, they were people who appealed to him for one reason or another because of their circumstances, their need, the tragedy in their lives.

"Altogether, through July and August, it's a small cosmos in its own right," he said. "From now till well into June there'll be only two or three year-round residents, like Father O'Flynn. But, Mrs. Kent, I don't think, after the first

week, you'd find any lack of interest. I'd be willing to vouch for that."

"And if I refuse to see it, and decide to go off to England, in spite of your counsels?"

"I shall wish you luck, and shall know you won't live the life there you need to live."

"And dismiss me from your list of former patients to be still kept an eye on?"

"Certainly, if you wish that. I can't very well keep an eye on you across the water. And I admit I've been following up you and your future in a way perhaps not very acceptable. But that, my dear young woman, is because I can't willingly see you take the wrong course."

"And you think this is the only right one?"

"Not exactly that. But I think it ideal. Won't you take time to consider it?"

"Just a little time, Dr. Kennedy." Her rebellious look promised him exactly nothing. How could he blame her? As well expect one of those wild gulls out there to fly in at the window where the two were standing and feel at home!

VI

*Fate takes a hand in the discussion. It frequently does.
But it seems a pity to have it such an unkind Fate*

IT WAS at this moment that a new element came into the discussion, which thus far had seemed extremely likely to get nowhere. While they had been going over the house, black clouds unnoticed had been rolling up from the northeast, but not until this moment had these actually obscured the western sunlight. A heavy clap of thunder announced the rapid approach of an April storm. Already big drops of rain were beginning to dash against the windows toward the sea. Kennedy ran about, hurriedly closing them.

Judith sat down in the window seat, watching the skies and the sea, for the waters, under the sudden heavy wind, had become a tumult. It was a splendid scene which lay before her—dark, yet vivid with constant flashes of lightning, and sonorous with the constant rollings and reverberations of the thunder. To her the whole aspect of the place had altered. She was decidedly

more drawn to it now, under the violent assault of the storm, than she had been under the spring-like quiet, the April sunshine. It was no longer commonplace, that sea line, but intensely dramatic. She had watched many storms from the decks or portholes of liners; she could recall seeing none from such a point of vantage as this row of windows looking out from the cliff over the angry seas.

"Magnificent display, isn't it?" commented Lyle Kennedy, standing behind her, watching also.

"Glorious. I'm afraid it will be over all too soon."

"You never can tell, in April. I may have let you in for two or three hours' stay, while we wait to be sure of good weather for the trip back in the open car. I ought to have brought you in the closed one, I'm afraid. I'll make a fire; you mustn't be chilled. It will be cooler after this storm."

He set about it, while the tempest raged, and Judith continued to glory in it. It represented to her what she loved most in her life—action, drama, incessant change. The wild beauty of it, the power, the uncertainty as to what might come next—this stretch of sea was for the mo-

ment to her no backwater. It was a great stage, the very forefront of movement and variety.

"What's that?" Kennedy dropped his firewood and left the room in haste, and Judith, who had also heard a crash which was not that of thunder, nor like it, followed him into the wide hall which led to the roadside front of the house. The thing had happened, just outside the door, which was to make all the difference in the future conduct of her life, though she could at the time have no possible realization of that.

A small and battered car had smashed into a tree just outside the vine-covered gateway. It stood there, its whole flimsy front crushed into the trunk, black with rain. There was no sign of life about it. Along the ground lay scattered dingy bundles and bags, which evidently had been strapped upon the running board. Kennedy ran out into the drenching rain, the clouds black above his head, the thunder resounding, the scene lightened at short intervals with sharp flashes. He found, pinned by a broken steering wheel, the unconscious form of a young man in shabby clothes, blood streaming from his head, obviously cut by flying glass from a shattered wind shield.

There was nobody at hand to be called upon. Near-by houses were all closed. Father O'Flynn lived alone except for an elderly woman who looked after him. Kennedy had to work by himself. But physical strength and a brain accustomed to quick decisions accomplished the difficult task. He managed to push and pull the light car away from the tree, wrench the steering wheel to one side, and release the inert figure. Lifting it out, with the blood from the head dripping over his own shoulder, he bore it back to the house from whose open door Judith had now disappeared. But her wits also had been working.

"This way," she called, and Kennedy followed the sound of her voice into a small room at the side of the entrance door, furnished with summer wicker chairs and a wide couch. Seats and cushions were of gay-flowered chintz, more easily renewed than the finer fittings of the living room. She had run upstairs for sheets and towels, but the doors of all linen presses were locked. So the best she could do was to lay a rug, turned over, to protect the couch.

Kennedy laid his burden upon it and stood up, panting for a minute, for the struggle to release

the victim of the accident had been a severe one. But immediately he bent again to his patient.

"Not a thing to work with," he said impatiently. He pulled a fresh handkerchief from his pocket, made it into a pad, and pressed it over that one of the wounds in the head which was flowing most freely. "Can you hold this here—hard—till I search the house?"

"I've already looked. Everything's locked. Your priest—wouldn't he have supplies?"

"He would—some things, anyhow. I'll run down there. Keep that tight as you know how till I get back."

"I will."

There was already blood upon her hands, as upon Kennedy's, but she didn't mind that. For the moment things again were moving swiftly, a strange acceleration of her whole being amazed her. From inaction into action in the twinkling of an eye; that was life, out of which it seemed to her she had been so long

The face on the couch was gray-white beneath its tan. The whole slim body lay limp. The hands were work-worn and soiled, the shabby clothes showed here and there a rude patch. The hair was thick and fine, with a hint of curl in it. Just now it was tousled and wet with rain. The fea-

tures of the young face were good: a sensitive nose, well-cut lips, strongly marked eyebrows. The young man looked a possible twenty-five, not more, she thought. With her free hand she felt his pulse—rapid, feeble, uneven. She knew the situation must be critical. Shock—that was what he must be treated for, she knew, as soon as they could get something with which to cover him. She thought of her own warm motor-ing coat, lying over a chair in the hall; but she didn't dare leave her charge and remit the pressure on his wound to get it. It seemed ages before she heard the sound of Kennedy's footsteps returning. And meanwhile, all the time, the storm, keeping furiously at it, as though to prevent any rescue work from its own devastations.

The doctor came in, laden with supplies wrapped in a rubber poncho. He took them out, laying them forth on a table. There were clean white cloth, iodine, adhesive tape, scissors, and a bottle of something brown. Also there were blankets, coarse but clean and soft. The moment Kennedy went to work Judith Kent laid the blankets over the limp body, covering it warmly. Also, kneeling beside it, she unlaced and with some difficulty pulled off a pair of sodden shoes and ragged but—she noted this—

clean socks, exposing shapely and unexpectedly clean feet. It was at this moment that she decided upon her course of action.

It was that which a half hour before she would have considered out of the question.

VII

A fiddle without a fiddler. It was a pretty poor instrument, anyway, but several people are very sorry that both fiddle and fiddler got smashed

"OF COURSE he can't be moved."

"Ought not to be, at present. We can't tell just what we've got till he's conscious. If there's any doubt he'll have to be taken in to the hospital and X-rayed."

"Meanwhile could he be carried upstairs and put to bed in one of those nice guest rooms?"

Dr. Kennedy nodded. "How do you propose to make that possible?"

"Telephone in for supplies, have my chauffeur bring them out with my maid, and whatever nurse you choose, and set up housekeeping till the boy is fit to be moved—if he must go to a hospital. Or keep him here till he's well if the hospital isn't necessary."

The doctor's look indicated his surprise and approval. "You *are* a good sport," he said.

"I'll write out a list of the things I want from

the apartment, and you can telephone it from the nearest station, if you will."

Here was a young woman of action, indeed. He watched her take out from her handbag a notebook and pen, write quickly a long list of directions, add a telephone number, and hand him the torn-out sheet.

He received it with an amused expression. "First time I've taken orders for some years," he admitted.

She looked up, her expression matching his. "I'm afraid I'm a trifle dictatorial. But as for taking orders, it probably will be good for you. You can issue as many of your own as you like."

"That comforts me. Well—you're not afraid to stay here alone until I get back again? I'll have to go some miles to telephone. If he becomes conscious—which I don't expect just yet—keep him soothed and quiet."

"Yes. Doctor, may we have Miss Catesby?"

He paused at the door. "My best nurse?"

"Please. We may need her, and I want her, anyhow."

"Used to having your own way, I see. Well—I believe we might get her out just for a day or two. Her present patient is convalescent."

He went off in a hurry, and presently was telephoning a surprised Brennan, and an equally surprised Sarah Catesby. Also he was satisfying himself that he could be away from the hospital until morning—when as usual he would hold a clinic and operate on several patients.

In less than two hours the big Kent car rolled up to the door of the house at Wild Gull Cove. It was filled to overflowing with the three people, the blankets and hampers of food, hand luggage, and other things for which Judith had written her clear orders.

"Guess she's thought of everything," Martha had commented as she and Molly had rushed about the apartment. "Looks as if she meant to stay a month. I hope she won't send for me."

"I hope she does," Molly had answered excitedly as she consulted the list Brennan had written out. "I'd love it out at the seashore."

"I wouldn't. And she isn't strong enough yet to be looking after sick folks."

"We're to stop for a nurse at the hospital."

This they had done, and when Brennan had stowed Miss Catesby in the car, with her bag and her package of hospital supplies which Dr. Kennedy had ordered, Brennan said under his breath to Molly, "I drove a motor bus once,

to help a fellow out for a few days. This feels like that. I'll bet this car don't know itself from a movin' van."

The "moving van" had been warmly welcomed, and everybody had been put to work. The young patient, still unconscious, was carried up to a room the like of which it was highly probable he had never seen, and put deftly to bed, bathed, clad in hospital garments, and laid between fine linen sheets and under soft blankets. In the twinkling of an eye Miss Catesby had established herself, after the fashion of the experienced nurse, with everything she could need carefully arranged at hand. And then everybody sat down to wait—the only thing left to be done, until the patient himself should indicate by his condition what was to come next.

"You didn't come to tea with me, Miss Catesby. You didn't even answer my notes inviting you. I can see the only way to get you is to lure you with a 'case.'"

"I reckon that's about it, Mrs. Kent. I was too busy to answer the notes. I suppose I was rude."

The two regarded each other in the dim light. Judith saw the plain, strong face she had studied

so many times in other dim lights, with the same look upon it of grim attention to duty. Even while she answered, Miss Catesby's trained fingers rested upon her new patient's pulse. But her glance at Mrs. Kent had revealed what she had never been wholly able to conceal—a sort of restrained appreciation of what she saw. Beauty, though she would have denied it, always tugged at her starved senses. And Mrs. Kent, restored to all appearances to perfect health, was a figure of quite irresistible appeal. She looked younger, too: a bare twenty-five, to Miss Catesby's appraising eye, who at the hospital had given her five more than that.

“You're forgiven because you're you. I didn't really expect you to come to tea. But I meant to see you again, somehow, and quite often. I'm glad I've got you now.”

“Orders are orders,” was the nurse's uncompromising reply, but her lips relaxed into a real smile, showing her strong white teeth and giving her, in Judith's eyes, an attractiveness her face in repose did its best to deny.

In other rooms Molly was swiftly making beds. The whole affair was of interest to her. She liked change, and the last few months had provided little compared with past days, when she had

been off on many week-ends with her mistress. When Judith came into the room of her selection Molly had made it look as though it had been lived in recently. The dressing table was set forth with the accustomed silver and crystal; even the man's photograph which always stood beneath the central mirror back in the New York apartment occupied its usual place.

"Molly! Trust you to get up a room in the shortest possible order. This looks delightfully livable. Now run and see what you can do for yourself. We may be here for some time."

"I hope we will, Mrs. Kent. I always did like the seaside, and Brennan says the same. But if you're having Martha out you'll find her hard to make contented. She'll think it's lonely."

"Not for long. If we pull this poor young man through, Martha will be as pleased as anybody."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Kent. Do you think that's likely?"

"Nobody can tell. But it won't be for lack of care."

Downstairs again, late though it was, Judith had Brennan carry all the injured man's belongings into the small garage, where they lay upon the floor—a pitiful display. A battered suitcase containing a change of ragged underclothing,

several bundles which they didn't explore, an imitation-leather violin case with one end stove in. This Judith picked up and opened. Her exclamation brought Brennan to stand beside her, looking.

"Poor boy—I expect this was his greatest treasure."

"It's no good now," Brennan commented. "No mending that. But it wasn't much of a fiddle, Mrs. Kent. He thought it was—look the way he had the old piece of silk wrapped round it. It was his baby, all right."

"I'll wager he could play it." She was thinking of the long, slender fingers.

"About all he could do, I'd say. There's no sign of any other trade he has, unless it's in these bundles. Might have been some sort of a peddler. Maybe a refugee from some of those flood places."

This was Dr. Kennedy's theory also. They were back in the living room. It was after midnight, and he had just told Judith that she must go to bed. But she had lingered to find out what he thought of his patient and to thank him for saying that he was going to stretch himself out on the big couch by the fireplace and nap it till toward daylight.

"It will be a comfort to have you here, and I think you're better satisfied yourself not to leave him while those dangerous small hours of the night are on."

"Miss Catesby could pretty nearly wake the dead, but I admit I want to see those eyes up there open, if I can have that satisfaction. Down and out—lost everything he had. He's trying to find a new place and new job. I expect, if he gets out of this, you'll be trying to find him one."

"Of course I shall. I might give him one out here."

His eyes surveyed her; he was smiling. "Decision to stay on all made?"

"For a time, yes. The situation has grown dramatic since the hour the storm began. It was merely static before that. I haven't had a thing to do for so long I could almost welcome this touch of tragedy—if it doesn't become the real thing."

"I don't think it will. The boy's pulse is less ragged—the outlook is a little brighter. We'll know more when he comes to himself. Meanwhile, though I'd like to keep you here with me, talking, I'm going to insist——"

"I'll go, Dr. Kennedy." She moved toward the stairway which led up from the big living room and around a gallery upon which several bedroom doors opened. "It's really—speaking of drama—a stagey sort of house, isn't it? Charmingly so. One can make one's exits and entrances with such effect. You know how that would appeal to me. I've been so used to making them."

"I'll watch you make your exit now."

"Oh, will you? How horribly self-conscious I shall be!"

"Not more so than you've undoubtedly been a hundred times, perfectly as you've concealed it. Can any man or woman be otherwise, in any public place?"

"I suppose not. And if you weren't, you'd lose half the thrill. Good-night, Dr. Kennedy."

"Good-night, Mrs. Kent."

A lovely erect young figure, she walked across the room and up the staircase without turning her head. She went along the gallery, hand on rail, the full length. She reached the door of the guest room which had been given to the injured boy. At this moment the watcher was certain she had forgotten him, for still without looking back she carefully opened the door of the room.

The next moment she was out upon the gallery again, her face eager. She bent over the rail and spoke softly down to him, beckoning:

"He's conscious."

He ran up.

"Where's my—fiddle?"

They stood about his bed, watching him. It had taken him some time to come really to himself. They had not encouraged his speaking. But when he had arrived at the point of examining each friendly face and trying several times to find words, this was his first question.

Judith Kent bent above him. "You are going to have a new fiddle," she said.

"What's happened—to mine?"

At a glance from Judith the doctor took charge of the questionnaire.

"You had a little accident in the storm. We picked you up, and this lady has taken you into her home till you're fit again. The fiddle had a worse time of it than you—it got smashed. You might have been, but weren't. She says you're to have another fiddle. She keeps her promises. Now, will you rest on that and go to sleep for a while?"

The blue eyes which had turned from Judith's

to Kennedy's closed again, the lashes quivered.

"Guess I'll have to," the weak voice answered. "Guess I ain't got much to say about it. Feels like I ain't all here."

"You are—pretty much. There'll be more of you here in a few more hours. We'll say good-night to you, and your nurse will stay by."

Miss Catesby brought her face within range of her patient's eyes. "I'm the nurse," she said reassuringly. "I'll take good care of you, lad. Now go to sleep, as the doctor says."

The blue eyes closed. The doctor felt the pulse, nodded, made a suggestion or two to Miss Catesby, and went out.

He waited outside the door for Judith, who lingered a little, then came out, closing the door behind her.

"Are you sure of him now?" she asked anxiously.

"Never sure of anything till time tells us more than his being able to speak does. But it looks as though there mayn't be any serious injury—and if he can move in the morning we shall know. When I found him he was pretty tightly pinned—there may be an aftermath to that. But you've started a hospital—or a convalescent's home—you should be content. I can send you more

patients, you know. Somehow, you can be an executive, if you must be. Have an office and sit at a desk, right here, where the air is good."

Her glance was suddenly sparkling. "I may take you up on that."

"You might do worse, for an interest. But I should limit the patients to three at a time. The house has three guest rooms, I believe. I shouldn't allow you a ward."

"Oh, shouldn't you? You've no idea how fast I can make things happen. Anyhow, I've something to do for a little."

"Wild Gull Cove," Kennedy mused. "The name suits the place so far as you are concerned, doesn't it?"

"Precisely. But you must remember that at any minute the gull may fly out to sea."

He was well aware of that. It was all he feared. But it was something to have got her to stay, even for a month. It would take at least that—if things went as well as he hoped—to heal their patient and send him on his way. And after that—who knew what might happen to detain her? For the present Kennedy was well content.

VIII

*All the people in the house seem to be mixed up in this chapter. It's not even coherent, so why read it? Yet—
please do*

IT WAS a week later that the apartment in town was partially dismantled. It was put into condition for a long abandonment, as on various occasions when the Rawley Kents had gone abroad for half a year at a time. Also, various pieces of furniture were loaded into a van, including the small grand piano, and a large Hepplewhite desk dear to its owner, because it was really the desk of an executive and was filled with orderly papers and files, notebooks and other evidences of being something other than a mere aid to private and frivolous correspondence. Two or three rugs of value, two particularly comfortable armchairs, several exquisitely framed photographs of people and places—all these went out to Wild Gull Cove and were installed there.

"I don't like this idea of stayin' in such an out-of-the-way place," Martha complained,

looking things over when she arrived. "What's there here, except the water? No movies, no neighbours, no chance to go shoppin' up and down Fourteenth. I never thought *she'd* settle down like this. And all for a boy that's laid up that she never knew before."

"Oh, no, it's not all for *him*," Brennan denied. "She just wants something to do. You could see the restless thoughts of her back in town, ever since she came home from hospital. This boy takes up her time just now, but she's got some other ideas in the back of her head. You'll see. I've heard her telephoning. She writes a lot of letters."

"I don't mind staying out here," Molly declared. "I don't mind being *anywhere* Mrs. Kent is."

"You're daffy about her," growled Martha. Her growl was no indication of her lack of loyalty, a loyalty which both Brennan and Molly knew was not to be impeached. She had to do a certain amount of fussing; but let anybody but herself try to say critical things of her mistress and she would present an embattled front of defense.

"She's the most beautiful person I ever saw," Molly went on. "Seems like she's grown more

beautiful just since Matt came. Listen to her playing to him. Take a look now—she won't notice. And look at him. I never saw anybody so crazy about music. Where he got it—and him the poorest of the poor!"

The three tiptoed to the blue-silk-curtained glass doors which separated the long living room from the somewhat smaller dining room. It was easy enough to push the silk slightly aside and peer through. It was late afternoon, the day was gray, a huge fire of logs burned on the hearth.

On a flat, straight invalid's cot, his head as low as his feet, the young Matt Moody lay, not far from the fire. A plain dark dressing gown enveloped him, his sandy hair was carefully combed, his blue eyes were intent on Mrs. Kent, at the piano. He looked very young, very pale, his whole appearance was pathetic.

"See him listen," Molly whispered.

"Sh-h-h!" Brennan warned, as the music came to an abrupt stop on a crashing chord.

"He's never goin' to get well," prophesied Martha.

"Sh-h-h!" Brennan pinched her elbow.

The outer room was now indeed as quiet as it had been sonorous with the brilliant closing phrases of a Brahms movement that Judith loved.

She sat still, staring out at the gray cove and the gray water beyond. Matt Moody lay staring at her.

Silently Molly pointed toward the violin case on a table by Matt's side. It was open, and the instrument within was one which had not been smashed against a tree. Matt liked to have it there, though as yet he had not been able to play it. One arm was still in a sling. There had been discovered a slight injury to his back. The sight of that silent violin had been touching Molly's warm heart ever since it had been placed there, several days before. When she waited on Matt she smiled at him, and he smiled back—a wistful sort of smile. She didn't get the chance but once a day—when tea was served in the living room. The rest of the time Miss Catesby was in charge. At the tea hour she was off duty and always out for a walk—to Molly's pleasure, for she liked to serve tea just to Mrs. Kent and poor Matt Moody. She had deep pity in her heart for him, and a strange liking, though even at his best, when he had been well and himself, she knew he couldn't have held a candle to Harry Casey, Molly's "steady" in town. Harry had driven out to see her last Sunday; he would be coming every Sunday. She would take care not

to let him see that she was interested in even such a broken piece of humanity as Matt, he was that jealous.

"Never trust a red-headed girl," he would say, with his arm around her.

"Then don't think of marrying her," Molly would flash back.

"I'm not thinkin' of it—I'm doin' it, and it won't be long, at that," would be his confident reply. "And then I'm goin' to get her a straight sand-coloured wig to wear when she goes out. You can trust them sand-coloured girls—they don't fire so easy."

"Oh, don't they? How do you know, please, sir?"

"I know by lookin' at 'em, not by huggin' 'em." And Harry would emphasize his meaning by one of those hugs that took Molly's breath away, though she would pull away from him at once and pretend to be very angry with him. She really wasn't sure whether she actually cared for him or not.

None the less did Molly like to bring in the tea things and at Mrs. Kent's bidding adjust the glass tube which enabled a young man on his back to sip his tea with ease. She never tilted it too much, so that it would choke him. An

unusually clever, piquant, knowing girl was Molly. Judith Kent liked having her and her prettiness and dainty ways around almost as much as Molly liked being near her mistress. And so, at tea time, did Matt appreciate having Molly's firm young fingers hold his tube. It made the tea taste better than the broths Miss Catesby offered him through that same tube. He liked Miss Catesby, she took such care of him, but her piercing gray eyes regarding him gravely didn't please him as much as Molly's merry blue ones, though he was very shy about meeting the direct glance of either pair.

It was a full five minutes before Judith, sitting at her piano, turned back from her gazing at the gray water beyond the gray rocks, and looked across at her young guest.

"How did you like that last one?" she asked him.

"I never heard anything like it, lady."

"Don't call me 'lady,' Matt, please. I'd rather you said 'Mrs. Kent.'"

"Then I sure will. But—I don't mean it like the girls say 'lady' in the stores. It's because you *are* one—and I haven't ever known any of your kind."

"That makes it better," she acknowledged,

smiling. "But even so, to other people, a good many of them, it wouldn't sound as you mean it. And if you're going to stay with me for a while—until you're well—I want you to learn a few things it will help you to know when you get out into the world again. You'd like to do that, wouldn't you?"

"I sure would—Mrs. Kent."

"Very well. Now let's go back to the music. Did you like that last thing I played the best of any—if you can remember what the others were like?"

"No, ma'am. The one I liked best was the one before that last."

Her expression of pleasure was a surprised one. "Really, Matt? But tell me. Why did you like that best?"

"I don't know if I can." A faint flush tinged his pale cheek. "I guess it was because it did something queer to me. Made me feel as if I could reach out and play my old fiddle different from any way I ever did before. . . . I mean—" in hasty apology—"my new one." He put out his uninjured arm and touched the violin in its open case beside him. "It's hard to wait till I can play it. Mrs. Kent—was there any left of the old one? I mean—I guess when they found

it was smashed they threw it away. Anybody would."

"I don't know, Matt. Would you like to have me find out? I'm afraid Brennan might, not thinking. But we'll see."

She left the room. In a few minutes Brennan came in alone, bearing the remains of the cheap little fiddle. Remains was the word. Not the best of instrument repairers could have made it whole again or thought it worth while to try.

"Here you are, Sonny." There was usually a trifle of condescension in Brennan's tone and manner for Matt Moody, though he was sorry for him. But in his opinion nobody who had been driving a battered old car like that, with all his poor worldly goods tied by ropes on its outside, could amount to anything. A judge of quality in many lines was Brennan—or so considered himself. His well-fitting house clothes, his natty chauffeur's livery, his experience in service which had included driving only fine motors for wealthy patrons, had made something of a snob of him. But underneath his air of patronage for those beneath him was a quality more genuine, which the Kents had recognized, or they wouldn't have kept him at all.

"Oh!" Matt was looking at the broken thing

as a young father might at a sick child. Brennan laid it on the table beside the new treasure.

"Don't believe you'll want to see it again, eh? The new one, now, that's a real one."

"I know it. But I—this one has been along with me since I was a little shaver—I earned it. . . ." Matt's lips were trembling; he pressed them tight together—he wouldn't be a baby in the eyes of this upstanding person whose very hands were as carefully kept as those of a gentleman. Matt had noticed that. His own were carefully kept now, thanks to Miss Catesby, but before that he hadn't known quite how it was done.

"It's too bad," Brennan agreed. "But you want to forget it now. Everybody loses things—gets 'em broken. I'd better take this away before you start to cryin' about it, don't you think?"

"No." The boy's voice was suddenly firm. "If you'll please leave it here maybe Molly'll put it in my room for me when she comes in with the tea."

"Oh, you think she's got a softer heart than me, do you? I'll put it in your room myself, Sonny, if you really want to keep the junk that'll just be remindin' you of your hard luck."

Matt nodded his thanks. He knew Brennan couldn't possibly understand what made him

care so much for so humble a possession in its now ruined condition. To Matt it would be like deserting an old and tried friend not to keep what was left of his constant comrade for four years. If Brennan just knew how many nickels and dimes—even quarters sometimes—that comrade had earned for him. . . .

IX

A letter, and rather a grudging one, if we are any judge of letters. The receiver isn't likely to get much out of it—as the writer obviously intended he shouldn't

Wild Gull Cove,
May 10th

DEAR RAWLEY:

I am going to do as I promised, though I am not at all sure whether it wouldn't be better to let absolute silence fall between us for this year, while we try to think things through. But your short letter telling me of your getting settled in gave me so much pleasure, as I visualized you under exactly the conditions you enjoy so much, that I really want to reply. Your descriptions of the place you have found, of the log cabin, the far sweeping view of the mountains, of your ranch companion, Dave, were very vivid. You always could write entertaining letters. And your request, at the end, that I should let you know what I am doing, can't entirely be denied, even though I feel that we should do best to let each

other quite alone. If we don't, it's a little like jumping into the sea, with a rope tied round one's waist and somebody at the other end to pull one back—isn't it? And I not only don't want you to feel that way; I don't want to, myself. Absolute freedom—that's what we set out for, and if we find that even infrequent letters are hampering that we must stop writing. You'll agree to that, I know. Under that condition I'll proceed.

"I suppose you can't know that within a week after your leaving I went to the hospital. I was there for six weeks and came away pretty much made over. I had a marvellous surgeon, Dr. Kennedy—of course you know him, by repute, at least. Also, I had a nurse who can have few equals—a Maine person who looked as though she had been born knowing everything and who domineered over me, amused me, and pulled me through bad hours by sheer force of her unique personality. She is with me still, though not because I need her for myself.

Dr. Kennedy and I had a set-to as to what I should do when I got about. It ended—I won't go into details—by my being established in a rented house—a very charming one—on the cliffs above Wild Gull Cove, a place about thirty

miles out which must have been named for me. Dr. K. wouldn't hear of my going back at once—or for some time—into my old places of responsibility. He commanded me to resign all chairmanships, speaking engagements, and so forth, and give myself over, all summer, to sun and wind and water. Note: I have resigned nothing, but I am taking the summer off, most obediently.

I have Brennan, Martha, and Molly with me. I have also Miss Catesby, my hospital nurse, in charge of a young fellow who got himself broken up just outside my door and now lies stretched out on his movable bed, wherever we decide to put him. He's a touching figure, is Matt Moody. He has little education, but there's a sensitive spirit inside his injured body, and a deep love of music. His arm was broken and his back somewhat hurt, so he can't yet play the fiddle I've provided for him, his own beloved though poor one having been smashed along with himself.

As yet I don't know what to do with all my time. I'm not used to being without a crowded schedule, as you know. A daily dip in the sea, a sunning on the beach—plenty of books, of course, sent out weekly—an hour or two of read-

ing to Matt—or playing for him on the piano I've had brought out from the apartment. Of course we haven't given up the apartment, and I expect to be back in it in the fall, doing everything Dr. K. doesn't want me to do. I may stand this inactivity for a summer, but after that the deluge—the deluge I so hugely enjoy—something important to do every minute. Telegrams, replies, long-distance messages, crowds, speeches, contacts—I can't live long without them. Which, as we well know, is the fundamental difference between us, you and me. Meanwhile, if I can help Matt Moody back to health I shall feel the time spent here not altogether lost. Wild Gull Cove! The wild gulls which come in such numbers are off and away again when they please. At present one gull with a broken wing is just waiting for it to heal before she's off to do as she pleases and the doctors be hanged.

Only I can't hang my doctor. He's too kind.

With every good wish for you,

JUDITH.

X

The Listening Post doesn't approve of the arrival of two entirely unexpected guests. But it can't do anything about it except grumble—which it does

MOLLY opened the door to a tall, thin, youngish man with hollows in his cheeks. She saw at a glance that he was probably a gentleman, that he was either ill or worn out, and that he meant to come in, for he had beside him on the door-stone a large travelling bag. Of course he might be an agent for something, but experienced Molly didn't think so.

"Is Mrs. Kent in?"

"No, sir. She's gone into town. She'll be back sometime this afternoon."

He turned and summoned the taxi driver who had brought him out, and paid him a goodly sum. Then he walked in, slowly, past the maid to the living room, leaving his bag in the hall. She followed, a little worried.

He dropped upon the big couch, half closing

his eyes. Then he opened them wearily, as though it were almost impossible to go through with any necessary explanation, though he recognized the need of giving it.

"Could you get me some strong tea?" he asked. "No lemon or sugar or anything. I'm Mrs. Kent's cousin—you needn't be afraid of me. I couldn't knock down a puppy at the present moment."

Molly was sure of this. Nevertheless, she wished Brennan were here, for Martha was a fearful coward, out here in what she called a forsaken country. Then she thought of Miss Catesby, down on the beach with Matt. Mrs. Kent had him taken down every sunny day on a stretcher and sheltered by a big beach umbrella. Miss Catesby would be equal to dealing with any trouble which might come of letting in a strange man.

She went away for the tea, came back with it, and served it. The visitor, sitting up as though he were a half-full bag of meal and might slump down again at any moment, gulped down the tea as though he couldn't get the support of it soon enough. And almost immediately Mrs. Kent's car, arriving silently as usual, brought her home. Molly went to the door to

meet her and found her accompanied by another tired-looking person.

"Well!" said Molly to herself. "Looks like we're a sort of sanitarium out here. This one's sure pretty, though, when she's rested. And young—can't be older than Mrs. Kent. Lots to worry her right now, I'll say."

This second stranger was a pale, dark-haired girl with cameo-like features. She was dressed in black with the simplicity of perfection. Her fine black eyes were very heavy, but her smile at Mrs. Kent struck Molly as not only grateful but game. She looked almost as ready to faint as had the man drinking tea in the living room. Anyhow, here was Mrs. Kent, and she would know what to do. More tea, undoubtedly, though it was a little early to serve it.

"There's a gentleman in there, Mrs. Kent," Molly said softly. "He says he's your cousin. He seems sort of not very well."

Judith crossed the living room with quick steps, hands out, her other guest for the moment left behind.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried. "My dear—how glad I am to see you!—But—what have you been doing to yourself?"

He had lifted himself to his feet with what

would have been alertness if he could have managed it, and, bending, kissed her with what was evidently warm affection.

"Judy," he said, in a peculiar high-strung voice she well remembered, "I thought if I could just get to you it would be—a sort of salvation. I haven't seen you for two years, but I think of you always as a fountain of youth and energy. I thought perhaps you could impart some to me—who need it."

"Of course I can. We're all energy here, and we like to tap it for those who are for the moment lacking it. And here's another. I've just brought a friend home who's been overdoing. I'm going to put her to bed. And when I come back I'll do the same for you, if you like. This is my cousin, Mr. Colfax, Miss Thorne."

Both visitors seemed much too weary to care whether or not they met, though each made an effort to be polite.

"My cousin, Mrs. Kent, has the right idea in both our cases, perhaps, Miss Thorne? If you've come as far as I have to reach her, we both appreciate a quiet haven."

"I've not come far to reach her," said Miss Thorne, with her game little smile, "but she's come a long way to bring me here."

"Both of you, then, are to do as I say. I see, Arthur, you've had your tea——"

"I asked for it."

"—So I'll give Miss Thorne hers in her room. Perhaps to-morrow you'll both feel equal to having it with me and Matt Moody."

"Is he—or she—also tired?" Arthur Colfax inquired, preparing to sink back upon the couch the instant Judith and her other guest should be on their way up the stairway to the gallery.

"Not so much tired as injured. I'll tell you about him later."

In the kitchen, presently, with preparations for three supper trays well advanced, the Listening Post talked it over. Here, as usual, might be found intimate knowledge of the ways of the household. To-night Molly and Brennan were the sources of information; Martha, skilfully preparing a certain dish warranted to be tasty and yet not to tax an invalid digestion, was full of comment. Speculation all around was rife.

"I'll say," said Martha gloomily, "we may as well put up a sign and be done with it. 'Meals served at all hours.'"

"Well, I think it's too much for Mrs. Kent," Molly declared. "Her in town for the day—

which she hasn't been for *all* day since she came out here a month ago. And then she brings out this Miss Thorne that looks as if a breath would blow her away. And finds this Cousin Arthur that can't wait till he gets in the door for tea. And Matt Moody getting along so slow it looks like he'd never get well at all. And not that I'd blame him, with her playing to him every evening, and Dr. Kennedy coming out twice a week to make a fuss over him."

"Dr. Kennedy may come on Matt's account and he may not," Brennan observed. "I suppose now he'll have another excuse. Two more tray people."

"Get me that bunch of parsley in the ice box, one of you." Martha had them both at her beck and call when she was busy. It was Brennan who responded. Molly had pointed to her crisply ironed organdie apron, and had smiled at him. She was dressed for taking up the trays. Brennan wasn't regularly a butler, and Judith preferred Molly's deft service. But the three, in the relaxed atmosphere of the informal seaside living, helped each other out in a way they would never have thought of in the city.

"Where did she pick up this Miss Thorne, Billy?" Molly asked.

"Place where she goes to get her clothes made. And many's the hour I've sat outside."

"Any other people like Mrs. Kent go there?"

"Some. Not so many. I don't think the place is one of the swank ones."

"It must be. Nobody in the city dresses any better than Mrs. Kent."

"See here, Molly girl. You're goin' to go off your head some day about Mrs. Kent."

"You know you think your eyes of her yourself," Molly came back. "And Martha, too."

Brennan grinned.

"I don't think she can't make any mistakes. And I think she's made one now. This one she brings home is a used-up girl, or I don't know one. She's a gold digger, like enough. You know as well as I do there's them that take all they can get, specially if a rich woman shows 'em any time. Why, I had to help that girl down the long steps from the house when I'd gone up to bring down her luggage. 'Give her your arm, Brennan,' says Mrs. Kent, and I had to drop her hat box to do it, she seemin' faint. Faint! She'd just wiped off her make-up, that was all. Playin' on Mrs. Kent's feelin's. I know her sort. Wanted to get asked to stay out here a month."

"Who wouldn't? That tray ready, Martha?"

Wait, I'll put a rose on it. She brought out a whole boxful for the house."

"That ain't orders, is it? Take it up while everything's hot. If Mrs. Kent's got to eat alone she can have all her roses."

Suspicious—they were all that. Ready to resent anything that might make Mrs. Kent's own complete convalescence more difficult. For they understood somehow that Dr. Kennedy was anxious that their lady shouldn't retard her return to perfect health by overweariness or tension. Certain small white tablets which must so rigorously be taken after every meal stood to the Listening Post for the fact that she was, in spite of her constantly increasing evidence of feeling like her old energetic self, still to be looked after. They had become accustomed to Matt Moody, even fond of him; but further than that in keeping an invalid's home they were sure she shouldn't go. And now within an hour of each other had arrived two people who had to be put immediately to bed because they weren't fit to stay out of it! The Listening Post would like to know what next!

XI

It's difficult, dealing with a person who has gotten very much on his own nerves. But it can be done, if one knows how

WHAT literally came next, after Judith had installed Eleanor Thorne in the sort of guest room which makes the guest feel as though she had reached a haven of rest, was a talk with her cousin. He had been shown upstairs to his room, had bathed and made ready for bed, had eaten lightly of the food brought him. Then, just after Matt Moody had also been taken to his own room, and nobody was left in the living room except Judith, lying back in a great chair by the window, looking out from the nearly unlighted room upon the dark waters below, Arthur Colfax opened his door upon the balcony. He made sure that only one familiar figure was there; then, in dressing gown and slippers, he came slowly down. At the light shuffling sound of his footsteps she turned her head.

"I thought you might come back," she said. "I'm glad you did. You're on my mind. Stretch

out there on the couch and tell me all about it."

"First—where's Rawley? I suppose I've taken it for granted he'd turn up at any minute."

"Rawley's away—just now."

"I hope you won't mind if I say I'm rather glad, much as I like him. I seem to want to see nobody but you."

"Then you needn't, of course."

The light from the one shaded lamp on the piano near by shone softly on both their faces as they scanned each other. Colfax's unhappy eyes met Judith's somewhat as might those of a boy who had come back to his mother after long absence and many delinquencies. He breathed a heavy sigh as he settled into the comfortable cushions of a deep chair.

"Just to look at you—to be near you—helps," he said. "It always did."

"I'm glad of that, my dear. Quite evidently you need help. But, after all, don't tell me about it just yet. Stay quiet for a little and look out at the sea with me. I've been watching the moon rise—it's a great sight. That path across the water looks unreal, it's so beautiful."

Obediently he looked, with her, and said it was very beautiful, but that he couldn't stand silence long to-night, exhausted though he was.

"All right, then—fire away. I think I know—or can guess. You're bothered by that old insomnia again, and there's a reason, as there always was. Something has gone wrong. What is it?"

"Judith, I haven't slept over an hour a night for weeks. And I hate to tell you the reason, but I must. I want to. It's my only chance at letting down. But first—let me say how dear you seem to me, sitting there. Younger and lovelier than ever, at—how old are you? You can't be anywhere near thirty yet."

She smiled. "It's not so far away. A bit of figuring would tell you that. Besides, you know very well I'm just six years younger than you."

"In years. In experience and wear and tear of life I'm twenty years older."

"If you are it's because you've taken life hard, Arthur. Always keyed up over it—tied up in double-bow knots over everything, often needlessly. Evidently just now the knots are tied hard, and you can't loosen them by yourself."

"I'm ashamed to admit it, but you know me too well."

"That old insomnia again, poor boy! Well, I suppose," said Judith, going straight to the point, "taking on the presidency of that com-

paratively small but probably complex college—aren't all coeducational schools complex?—has made you feel as though you were trying to run the universe. One can't run the universe and sleep much. I know just how you've gone at it—teeth in, feet braced, expecting to get everything pulled your way in the first short year. And because your boys and girls are still difficult to handle you've gotten up a terrific case of nerves about it. Am I right?"

"Right enough, I suppose. But I've made some headway, Judith, educationally. I'm not going to say much about that. I'm fairly content with that part of my job. What bothers me is that I can't change the general attitude of those youngsters toward life. Some of them are in a bad way—they worry me. I can't influence them—can't give them my standards. I know I'm what might be called a superidealist—I dream dreams and want them to become realities. One of my dreams is that I shan't need to watch my students. But I have to, Judith."

"Just the same, I shouldn't very much. How can you possibly watch them? Give them what you can in the way of sane outlooks and then trust them. If they think you're watching them, spying on them, they'll evade you all the more."

“I know. I’ve done my best not to seem to watch. But there’s one group that has bothered me from the beginning. And now—something’s happened——”

He turned his head away, seeming unable to go on.

Judith waited. She was deeply sorry, deeply concerned for him. Whatever that thing was, it had taken hold of him fearfully. He lay back in his deep chair, his long legs stretched before him, and drew breath after breath of exhaustion—exhaustion which it was plain was that of the spirit chiefly, though that of the body was not negligible. Insomnia, to the degree which he admitted, depletes every power of mind and body. Several times before in his not yet long life he had had these attacks. He had, in his own school days, been a brilliant scholar; he possessed now a fine mind, capable of unusual achievement. Judith could easily guess that the year just past had been a great one for young Holworthy; very likely, with Arthur Colfax at its head, its enrolment for the year to come exceeded that of any previous year. If so, he had done it by himself being on fire every hour of every day with enthusiasm, by firing the ambition of every man and woman on his fac-

ulty. Young as he was for the post, Judith had no doubt that he had almost literally carried the school on his slender shoulders for those first nine months of his reign. No wonder he was worn out.

For a time it seemed to be impossible for him to tell her what it was that had so shaken him even though he vowed he must do it to obtain any peace of mind. But little by little she got it out of him. His forehead was glistening with nervous sweat as he began. She had helped him to that beginning by her own quiet manner of speaking, as though whatever it was she wasn't going to be upset about it.

"Just go ahead, my dear. Don't mind me. I'm just somebody to listen and understand without any exclamations of horror, no matter what it is. Remember, I'm no schoolgirl, but a woman who knows what goes on in this quite extraordinary world."

"The schoolgirls do, too," he muttered, "and that's the worst of it."

"That's how you look at it. But even though they do, I have a little more mature point of view. Come, Arthur—let's get it over."

After all, she found, he had something on his mind worth being unhappy over. There really

had been a tragedy in the school, in which he had shared, because it had come so close to him. A beautiful and popular girl with whom in spite of himself he had fallen in love—though he had been able to conceal that, he was sure, because he had known she would never think of him. A new student, coming in at the beginning of the last semester, a handsome youth, who swept everything before him because of his looks, his athletic prowess, his unassuming yet definite gift of leadership. The girl and he had been drawn together from the first hour of meeting—it had been one of those whirlwind affairs which set a whole school by the ears, everybody talking, envying, criticizing. Then, suddenly, one early morning, the girl's body found in the small lake at the edge of the campus; the boy gone overnight. Excitement, horror, and on Arthur's own part a shock too heavy to be borne; he had only just managed to keep his head, his dignity, and his management of the situation—and to get through to the close of the year, before he collapsed.

The worst of it was, he felt himself totally unfit to go back and begin the summer work which his post entailed. Judith knew well enough that the head of such an institution has

little chance at a summer vacation. Almost as much work, if of a different sort, goes on behind the closed doors as the open ones.

"But you will be fit in no time at all," she said confidently, "if you'll just stay here with me for a fortnight."

He shook his head. "Nothing can ever make me sleep again."

"Why not?"

"Why not!" He was shaking all over with the reaction from his halting recital, every word of which had shown clearly the emotional strain under which he was labouring. "Why, Judith—I had to break this thing to her father and mother. I can never get their poor faces out of my mind. . . . Or—hers! . . . Or the terrible belief that it was all somehow my fault."

"It was not."

"Oh, yes, it was. You don't know."

"I know more than you do at this particular moment. Now, lie down on this couch and stay here quietly while I'm gone just for a few minutes."

He followed her blindly to the couch. She made him stretch himself out upon it. She went out to the kitchen, where there was nobody. The kitchen force had gone down upon the rocks—

she could see Brennan and Martha and Molly sitting in a row, watching the moonlit water. She thought Brennan's arm was around Molly and that he was wishing Martha away.

She made a hot drink, rich with nourishing properties, and took it back to him, with a second cupful for herself, to save his pride.

"Drink this, Arthur dear. I'm going to have some, too. I drank gallons of it this spring, when I was in hospital for a time."

He drank it thirstily, and she took the cup away. She sat down close beside him.

"I'm going to say just one thing to you, and then I mean to put you to sleep."—He groaned.—"Yes, to sleep—don't doubt it. . . . Listen to me. You were not one bit to blame for this terrible thing. But you did love the girl—or thought you did. You're torturing yourself with the thought that if you'd taken some measure or other you might have prevented what happened. You couldn't. The prevention of that lay far back, in the girl's training, in the boy's, in their temperaments. Not in rules you might make, or even in talks you might give, though of course they are important enough. Now you have to get over the shock of this thing—and you're going to, right here with me. I haven't been

studying men and woman all my life not to know what will put you right. If you'll let me have my way—and give me a little time——”

“I haven't any time—I must go back.”

“Not to-night. Nor to-morrow. We'll not say when. Right now, let me place those pillows the way I want them, so your head is at the end of the couch and your dressing gown well open. That's it—now let yourself relax.”

“That's it, Judith—I can't relax.” His tone was piteous.

“You can—and will. Now give yourself up to me. Don't speak. Close your eyes and keep them closed. I'm going to put out this light. There!—Now—*let go!*”

She could feel him shake his head with the hopelessness of being able to let go. She could feel the taut nerves in his forehead, in his throbbing temples, in his neck at the back. But she began her manipulations. She had learned them of Miss Catesby. She would have called that skilful person if she hadn't known that in this case her own familiar presence would be best, since least upsetting.

Stroke, stroke—moulding first with the tips of her fingers, then more deeply into the muscles of his neck, well down his back, and up again;

increasing the circulation, taking out the tension. It was hard work, but she enjoyed it from the moment when at last she felt him beginning unconsciously to give up to her. Pressing softly yet firmly over his eyeballs, smoothing his face; then back again at the neck, the base of his brain, reaching out under his loose gown to his shoulders. Then, all at once, she knew that he had slipped away into an exhausted sleep, and she exulted. Very gradually she ceased her work, finally drawing the light wool couch blanket over him and moving away with cautious steps. An open window, quiet, peace—how could he help but sleep?

Pausing as she went by the door of Eleanor Thorne's room, she heard small sounds as of one awake. But she had to go on to her own rest—she herself could give no more to-night. Nevertheless, in her heart was contentment. It had been a full, rich day, because people had come to her in trouble and she had been able to do something about it. It had been a reminder—by comparison—of the old days when she had made many motions for the good of humanity—telegrams, telephones, wireless messages, interviews. To-day, she had simply eased two heart-aches—and so, as a great man once said—had

forgotten her own. For actually, deep down in her consciousness, there *was* an ache. Something gone out of her life. Of course, it was her work, her job—for that had been what was making her life until the day when she went to the hospital. Yes, that was the date of the beginning of the ache. No other.

XII

We get something of an inkling as to why Molly the maid thinks a photograph wrongly placed

RAWLEY KENT's photograph, a large one in a silver frame, no longer stood, as it had for five years, upon his wife's dressing table. But it was not banished from her room. It was now upon her writing desk, and it was not alone, as it had been, in proud magnificence. A number of others, of family and friends, were grouped about it, so that it did not stand out, as it had been wont to do, as though it took precedence of everybody else in her regard.

"I wonder, now," said Molly to herself, dusting with her customary care everything upon both dressing table and desk, and eying the photograph as though she would apologize to it for not venturing to place it again where it had belonged, "why she puts you off here, Mr. Kent. And you the fine gentleman you are. And the way you have with you. Just the way you look out of that picture would make most women want you where they could see you while

they do their own faces. As she always has. As if the world was yours, and you knew it, but you weren't going to brag about it—that's the look of you."

It was rather an accurate characterization of the spirited dark face with the beautifully moulded features. Molly admitted to herself that they had grown just a shade heavier since that photograph of Rawley Kent, newly married to Judith Cunningham, had been taken. Molly had come to the pair upon their first residence in the large, inviting apartment where they had begun their married life; she had been with them ever since. The photograph had for the first three years been a perfect likeness of the master. After that he had gradually changed, put on a little extra flesh; the face had taken on new lines—slightly harder lines, possibly unhappy ones. When he smiled these had been instantly erased—but he had not smiled much, Molly was sure, for the last year.

He and Mrs. Kent had made a wonderful couple, she had always thought. She loved to see them when they were dressed for the evening, entertaining friends, or going out themselves. She had rather preferred the picture they made just before they left to take the lift from their

own foyer, on, say, a winter evening. Mrs. Kent with a marvellous ermine-collared evening cloak over her bare shoulders—he always put it on for her, and many a time, though his back was turned to the waiting maid, she had guessed that he put his lips to the shoulder before, smiling, he covered it. And he himself always looked so splendid, romantic Irish Molly considered, in his black and white, with his silk-lined top-coat and his hat and gloves in his hand. They would go laughing off together, and Molly would follow them in her imagination, emerging into the outside world, gracious to it, but none the less absorbed in each other. Oh, it had been an eye-filling thing to watch—for those first three years.

And then it had grown gradually to be different. Instead of their going abroad together, every so often, Rawley Kent had begun to go off on journeys by himself, and to remain away, at first for short periods, then for longer ones, sometimes growing into weeks. Judith Kent had become more and more busy with her own affairs, had sat at her desk dictating letters to a stenographer who came for two hours every morning. She had gone out by herself, both in daytime and at night, with increasing frequency. Molly, puzzled by these changes and secretly worried

by them, had been guilty of listening, to try to discover what had happened. She heard little, for the pair were invariably polite to each other in private, she was sure, as well as when they were aware that the ears of their domestic staff were pricked their way. There were no quarrels, with raised voices, certainly. But one evening she had really heard something. It was not long before Mr. Kent had left for what he had frankly said to the servants might be a long stay away—on important business—that was his phrase as he bade them good-bye and left huge tips in their hands, enjoining upon them to take the best of care of their mistress.

It wasn't really so much curiosity with the young Irish maid as it was love for the pair, and concern about them, which had caused her to steal within sight and hearing. It was so long since she had seen them with the old air of being perfectly happy together—she wanted terribly to understand what was the matter. On this occasion they were sitting formally together before the fireplace. Not on the big couch in front of it, as they had used to do, but in opposite chairs, as though he were making a call upon her, thought Molly. She listened. She heard only the exchange of a few sentences before Mr. Kent

had got to his feet and begun to march up and down the long room, making it dangerous for her to linger lest he turn suddenly and see the crack in the heavy oak door where her eyes and ears were alert. But they had been sentences to confirm her fears, even though she didn't fully comprehend what they stood for. Mrs. Kent had been speaking:

“It seems to take infinite wisdom and courage—more of both than most mortals have—to make a success of tying two lives—*any* two lives—so tight together. If there were only any way of not feeling that sense of being bound—bound—not able to get loose. And yet everyone goes into it with the idea that the very being tied tight is what is going to make life whole and wonderful. Why can't we see further ahead and realize what will happen, almost inevitably?”

She was saying these things very quietly and reflectively, her eyes studying the fire. Molly thought Mr. Kent must notice that she was looking perfectly marvellous to-night in that shimmering green-and-silver dress, with the long string of pearls he himself had given her. He was certainly watching her, though she didn't look at him at all. His face had a queer expression, Molly observed, as though he were swallow-

ing something very bitter. Perhaps he was. He answered shortly:

"Odd, isn't it?"

"Very odd—increasingly so. Now, if you had lived in the apartment above me and had dropped down for an occasional evening with me we might have gone on for years as the best friends in the world."

"You mean—evenings only?"

"Of course. The moment you make it more you make it—less. . . . At least—after a while."

This was cryptic, but Molly supposed he understood. At any rate, this was the moment when he sprang up from his chair and began to pace the room, his hands clenched by his sides, a frown deepening between his well-marked eyebrows. Up and down, up and down, while Molly cautiously lessened the crack, ready to close the door noiselessly at an instant's notice. But the pacing went on, and he did not speak, though twice he raised his head, and she thought he was going to say something. But when he finally did he had stopped behind his wife's chair, and what he said was spoken so low that the listener, at the other end of the room, couldn't catch it. And just then the telephone bell rang. Molly had to answer it. A wrong number, and

she was gone only a minute, but when she came back that door was closed. She didn't dare open it again.

It was a few days after this that Rawley Kent had put his lavish tips into the hands of his servants and gone away. They all, Molly and Brennan with his fine master's leather luggage, Martha behind them in the doorway, had seen him take leave of his wife. He had, at the last moment, kissed her quickly and gone—just like that, with no embrace, no lingering, no last word nor look. Not much as it had been five years before, when he had been leaving home for only a few days. Then the Kents hadn't hesitated to let their servants see that they hated to part and that, even though their farewell was a restrained one before those other eyes, it unconcealably stood for all the longing they would both experience before they came together again. Very different, this good-bye. "They might have been just cousins, and second cousins at that," was Molly's rating of the comparable relationship.

So Molly, dusting Mr. Kent's photograph, now that he had been away for nearly three months, and only one letter coming back as yet, felt a sadness for this pictured image of him, relegated to the desk and half buried behind pictures

of other and far less interesting and important people.

"You'll be in the drawer next, poor dear sir," she said aloud—and suddenly realized that her mistress had come into the room.

"Whom are you talking to, Molly?" inquired a half-humorous, half-annoyed voice. Molly wheeled, confused and apologetic.

"Please excuse me, Mrs. Kent. Maybe I was talking out loud. I do sometimes. It's foolish of me."

"Never mind. If you're through, I need the room, please."

"Yes, Mrs. Kent."

Molly vanished, her cheeks reddened. It was indeed foolish of her to be talking to Mr. Rawley Kent's photograph. But how could she help caring for him, when he had been so kind to her—and so fascinating, withal—for five years? Not that his pleasant smiles at her, his occasional rallyings of her on her sweethearts, the becomingness of her pretty uniforms, and such matters, had ever passed the boundaries of good taste from master to maid. But his kindness! There was the time, now, when Molly's young brother, Tim, an electrician and a competent one, had been arrested, in a private

house where he had been making some repairs, for a theft of jewels which he had not committed. He would have had a bad time of it in the courts, since the plaintiff was a woman of prominence and her lawyer a clever one, if his sister hadn't appealed to Mr. Kent. Rawley, quite convinced of Tim's innocence, had promptly supplied him with a still better lawyer and had seen the case through, being present himself at the various hearings until Tim was acquitted. There had been plenty of other occasions—gifts to make Molly's invalid mother comfortable—advice to her when she came to him with some family worry . . . Oh, there was every reason in the world why the loyal Irish maid should be jealous for the place of the master on that luxuriously appointed dressing table where he had reigned alone so long.

XIII

Past history, and decidedly perilous to recall. But how can one help recalling past history, especially if it has been poignant?

IN THE room Molly had just left Judith Kent stood looking with strange eyes at the photograph in its new and partially submerged place on the desk. She had exactly caught Molly's words, and they had made her wince. After all, why had she given her servants cause for more surmises than they already had by showing her husband this indignity? She knew well enough how they all felt toward him, and knew that they had every reason. With all his capacity for both a dashing gaiety and a quickly assumed dignity upon occasion, Rawley had always had the human touch which endeared him to people of all classes. It was that which had first endeared him to herself. Could she ever forget those first three years together, before anything had begun to come between them?

What was it that had come between them? It was so hard to analyze. Things had changed

so gradually—or was it that they themselves had changed, and which of them had changed most? Of course it was herself—she knew that. She had grown away from him, not he from her. She remembered the first time he had heard her speak in public, addressing a great group of club women, assembled from everywhere, the husbands of some of them—a small minority—present. Rawley had come to hear her, had come with a not quite concealed reluctance, but with his own chivalrous manner covering from all but herself his feeling about it. It was an unreasonable feeling, as he himself, more or less lightly accused of it by Judith, frankly admitted. They had talked it over, by their own fireside, afterward.

The speech had been a tremendous success. Young Mrs. Rawley Kent, radiating beauty, wealth, and magnetism, had been, among a number of notable speakers, both men and women, easily the star of the evening. Her smiling—yet not too smiling—poise (she herself was aware of how dangerous is the almost fixed sweetish grin upon a woman's face on such occasions), her delightful voice, quietly resonant, so that it could be heard all over the great room without her seeming to raise it overmuch;

above all, her clear thinking, her power of persuasion, her skilful use of the occasional sparkling illustration—all these factors had combined to that success. She had been congratulated a hundred times before she could get away, people crowding about her, while with a lovely graciousness she had protested against being overpraised. Rawley had stood on one side, with a group of admiring men, looking on, and wearing—or trying to wear—the proper expression for the man whose wife is taking all the honours, and of whom he is proud at the same time that—Well, it was a new experience for Rawley Kent. And the worst of it was, as it seemed to him, that it was only the beginning. He had heard future dates for more such affairs already being made. Wasn't his young and brilliant wife going to be drawn into an overwhelming amount of that sort of public thing, now that she had shown what she could do? That was, he knew, what did happen to women in these days. They became conspicuous—and learned to like it.

"I realized," said Judith, speaking softly, as she and Rawley sat upon the deep couch together at midnight, shortly after their return, and when they had partaken of the simple sandwiches and wine set out for them, as always,

"I did realize, in spite of all the thrill of it and all the fuss made over me, that you distinctly weren't approving, dearest."

"Now, how," mused Rawley, with an effort to be casual, "did the dear creature come to think that? She was never more beautiful—in public (oh, she can be a thousand times more beautiful in private!). She was witty, she was adorable, she had them all at her feet. She couldn't think her husband could fail to take enormous pride in her. Surely, he didn't seem to be glooming in the background?"

"No, he was all she could have asked of him, as he always is. But—somehow—she knew. . . . Rawley—" she sat up straight and looked at him, her eyes sparkling with excitement, to which she wanted no let-down, it was so thrilling to have done what she had done this night—"it takes just an edge off my pleasure in this little triumph to-night to know you didn't like it."

"Judy, dear, you have no right to say you know that. I admit I'm a jealous husband in a way. But if I thought these occasions wouldn't come too often from now on and that all these outside interests you've been acquiring wouldn't finally take you away from me, I shouldn't mind.

I do mean to be reasonable, but I just—well—I can't lose you, and it's impossible not to be afraid I shall."

"But that's ridiculous. When we were married I already had plenty of outside interests, as you call them. If I've taken on a few more it's because one thing leads to another."

"It does—inevitably. That's just it. The thing is cumulative. And you've proved to-night what you can do to hold people in the mass. You were as fascinating as an actress——"

"Rawley!"

"—as an actress who is also a lady—with a well-ordered mind. The combination is precisely what your various organizations want—and mighty seldom get. They'll eat you up. It's simply that I can't help foreseeing Mrs. Rawley Kent as a name pretty often in print. And pictured in the rotogravure section. Subject to discussion everywhere."

"Rawley, I've always been that, to a mild degree. So have you. . . . 'Mr. and Mrs. Rawley Kent as they came off the *Berengaria* to-day.' 'Rawley Kent on the polo grounds. Mr. Kent was the winner of the Asperges cup.' . . . And so on. Why, I can't think what's made you turn on the Sunday editions. Nobody can help them.

Everybody is interested in them, including ourselves. I can't understand you."

He was silent for a long minute. Then he moved nearer and drew her into his clasp as they sat together on the couch. His lips rested on her silky hair.

"Dearest," he said, "I suppose I'm probably the most unreasonable fellow on earth, but I never in my life knew what real happiness was till I saw you. From that hour—— But you know all that. And I know I don't amount to a thing in the world and probably never shall. I'm not the sort who can make myself work when I don't need to. Just the same, Judy——"

"Just the same," she said, her mood changing, "though you're a dreamer and maybe something of an idler, you're a bewilderingly delightful and interesting man, and I wouldn't have you anything but what you are. So think all your friends. Go and play for me, will you, dear? That will chase this queer little conflict of opinion into an agreement. I can't resist you when you make music for me."

She couldn't—it was the truth. He might have made a great musician if he had had the will to force himself to work at it. As it was, he had been trained by a master, in his boy-

hood days, and he could sit at his great piano and make magic with it. As he did now. He played Brahms and César Franck for his wife to-night—at two in the morning, rather—and while she listened she felt that he was right, that they must preserve their three years' dream of happiness and oneness at all costs, let the "organizations" clamour as they would. . . . After a time she came to lean upon the piano and stand looking into his face in the softly lighted room. It was a remarkable face, she told herself for the thousandth time, and when he finally raised his head, which had been bent over the keys, and looked into her eyes, she smiled captivately into his, the dream back again in her own.

This was one of the scenes of the past which came crowding into her mind to-day as, when Molly had left the room, she stood looking at Rawley's pictured face upon her desk. She had placed the photograph where it now was not actually to depose it from its high estate, but rather because she couldn't bear looking at it too much. In spite of all that had come after that first tiny entering wedge, so that now a real breach was between them, it hurt her to look into Rawley's fine, intent eyes as she must if

the picture continued to stand upon her dressing table.

"You'll be in the drawer next, poor dear sir," had been Molly's lament.

No, Judith said to herself, he would never be there. He had been part of her inmost life; no matter what happened, she could never forget him. But she couldn't, at the instance of her maid, replace the photograph. She found herself wishing to know just what her servants thought about it all and what they said. She was acutely conscious that she and Rawley had been many times discussed by the three. It was quite possible that Martha, Molly, and Brennan knew more about them than they knew themselves and could more accurately prophesy their future.

XIV

*Salt water in Wild Gull Cove. Some people swim in it,
others only splash about*

“The Three Musketeers
Lay making up arrears.”

Judith Kent stood surveying the three deck chairs in a row—not too near one another—on the wide and sunny porch which faced the sea. Matt Moody’s was drawn down nearly flat, as usual; the other two were only partially reclining. Arthur Colfax, president of the small, hardly known college, was acquiring the beginnings of a real coat of tan—it was just passing the stage of active sunburn. It was immensely more becoming than the sheet-like pallor which he had shown just one short week before. Eleanor Thorne, dressmaker, was also showing colour in her face; Brennan could no longer have accused her of wiping off her make-up—she had none to wipe off. All she now needed was a reserve of cooling face cream and this she kept in a small handbag, tucked into the corner of

her chair. The bag contained the usual mirror, and this was in frequent use. Miss Thorne didn't want her forehead to peel, as the college president's was doing.

Dr. Lyle Kennedy was leaving, having paid his usual weekly visit to Matt, and thus having met the two other patients. As Judith had explained to him, they had seemed to need nothing but rest and good food, and this was why he had not been called upon for his distinguished services. He had been much interested in the aggregation, however, presenting, as it did, three distinct types and as many social classes—or so, at first sight, it seemed to him. Four, really, he thought, for Miss Catesby had been present at the beginning of his visit, while he was giving orders for Matt.

He said good-bye to them, with a friendly keen look into each face, and strolled around the house with Judith, toward his waiting motor. When they were out of hearing he opened fire upon her.

“How are you standing it?”

“How do I look as though I were standing it?”

“Very well indeed. But I've learned not to trust a woman's looks—unless she's ill in bed and the rouge is out of reach. Mind if I take

you inside by the other door and do a little listening?"

"If you must. But I feel myself that I'm all right, and I'm the one who ought to know. I don't tire half as easily as I did six weeks ago, when I came out here."

"That's splendid."

Nevertheless, he made his examination.

"How wise and owlish you professional men look with those things in your ears," she commented lightly as he finished. "You should wear them all the time."

"A great idea. Well—" he put up the stethoscope—"everything's fine, if you'll just keep to about your present amount of activity—and responsibility. Of the three I should say your neurotic cousin is likely to give you the most trouble."

"Could you see that through his sunburn? But I don't think he's really a neurotic, Dr. Kennedy."

"The living image of one, in spite of the sunburn. Ready to go right up in the air at any moment. That isn't saying that he isn't a useful citizen when he can keep the steam from rising too high."

"He's a college president, and he's been doing

magnificent work all through this, his first year. But a terrible tragedy happened at just the end of the year, and he went to pieces. If you knew the circumstances you wouldn't wonder."

"Too bad. But that doesn't change his type. Tell me about the young woman."

"She's more interesting, isn't she? To me, too. Eleanor will be really beautiful, in her dark way, when we've put some flesh on her thin little body. She's worked so hard, dressmaking. Clever work, and a rising reputation—a pretty good small clientele. But worn out, and something worrying her, as seems to be the case with everyone. She nearly fainted while she was fitting me, and I made her come home with me. I'm keeping her for a fortnight. We've sent notes to all her customers telling them she is called out of town and arranging for the finishing of their gowns elsewhere."

Lyle Kennedy surveyed Judith intently. She looked like a girl in the sports clothes she wore most of the time out here—her burnished brown hair a little ruffled by the sea breeze, her brown eyes bright with interest. Her voice had a lovely quality, everything she said was enhanced by it. She seemed very happy.

"Nobody but you would think of bringing

home her dressmaker for such a visit," he commented, still watching her.

"Why not? A really good dressmaker is a creative person. Besides, Eleanor has an education—she's been to many schools of various sorts. I've long found her much more stimulating to talk to than many of her patrons. And when I look out on that porch and see my college president handing magazines across the space to her, and afterward hear them discussing some not-too-learned yet really thought-provoking article, I realize what I've always contended—that there's not so much basic difference between the so-called classes as we are apt to think."

"I should imagine her society might be very good for the college president. I'm beginning to think I shouldn't mind having some kind of disability myself, so I might make the fourth in that row—with you and Catesby in charge! How does Matt get on with the others?"

"Shy, silent, but interested. The boy puzzles me. I've an idea he thinks he isn't going to get entirely well, though you tell him he is, and is trying to brace himself to meet the knowledge. Miss Catesby talks to him of the time when he'll be off on the road again, but he never answers. I shall be so glad when his arm is in use again,

and he can play his violin. That, at least, will help him to wait till his back is well."

"It should, and in a few more weeks I'll have to have another talk with him. What were you planning to do next, if you'll let me ask, when I've gone? Sacrificially read aloud to your invalids? They don't need you."

"Not for a minute. The best thing for them is to let them alone. I was—if you must know—intending to go in swimming. It's exactly eleven o'clock, the ideal moment. Won't you stay and go, too?"

"By George, I'd like to." He looked at his watch. "I've swimming things down at my shack, but not time to go after them."

"You don't need them. I sent into town yesterday for some most beautiful swimming suits, for both men and women, so that I'd be always prepared. I almost think Arthur might be beguiled into going in if you do. Let me send you up to his room with two suits and see if he won't follow you."

"I'll stay. But you'll have to give me lunch afterward. Swimming makes me ravenous, and I have to be back at the hospital by three."

"Delighted to give you lunch. Run along up. I'll send Molly with the things."

As he undressed in Arthur Colfax's big and airy room, looking toward the sea, Dr. Kennedy's spirits were high. He hadn't been in the ocean this season, and the prospect of swimming lazily out into the blue water with Judith Kent was a lure. He couldn't help thinking how charming she would look in the sort of thing she would be sure to wear. He rather hoped the college president wouldn't go. Still, if he did, he'd probably only wet his shins and then stand skinnily about in the beach wash, watching the others gloriously plunging into the white-topped blue-green combers, not heavy to-day, but just inviting.

About the time Kennedy was ready, Colfax came into the room. The doctor felt he had to wait for him, though he didn't want to.

"Hullo! Decided to try it? Fine for you. I'll wait."

"Oh, don't bother to do that. Judith's ready. I'll have to take my time. I'll be mighty glad when my legs get over being wobbly."

"Swimming will help. You don't mean she's ready so soon! I've only been up here five minutes."

"She's about the quickest thing on earth. Besides—what does a woman wear these days

that she can't shed in ten seconds? We used to have the advantage—now they do.”

Kennedy laughed. “To a certain degree. Well, if you say so I'll run along. I've not so much time to spare.”

He went downstairs two steps at a time, looking trim and fit in the spick-and-span dark blue trunks with white top he had chosen. Let the college president have the maroon suit—he needed colour. He found Judith on the porch, standing by Eleanor Thorne's deck chair, wrapped in a woolly white cape, a tight little white rubber cap over her brown hair making her nun-like—or it would have done so if her brown eyes hadn't been so full of gaiety.

“Too bad Eleanor isn't up to going in yet, but she soon will be,” Judith said. Then she looked over at Matt Moody. “So will you, boy—and not so long hence.”

“I'll like to see you going in, Mrs. Kent,” he answered sturdily, though she saw how his thin fingers clutched the arms of his chair.

“Mrs. Kent—may I just see the things you have on under that delightful cape?” Miss Thorne's dark eyes were regarding Judith with affectionate interest.

"Of course." Judith opened the cape wide and let the "creative person's" trained, appraising glance sweep up and down.

"Stunning," was her comment. "I knew it would be, but I knew I couldn't see it so far away as the beach. It's the perfect thing for a perfect form to wear."

"Delicious nonsense," Judith laughed, flinging the cape close about herself again and turning toward Kennedy. He had found a striped crash beach robe with the other clothes upstairs and had put it on.

"I consider this garment also nonsense," he said, "and expect to drop it halfway down to the water."

"Do. I don't know why one should be so discreet on the porch and so free and easy on the sands. I assure you I shall drop this cape at the upper edge of the beach and proceed unencumbered."

"Great. I'll race you from that exact point."

They went off laughing, and the two on the porch looked wistfully after them.

"Isn't she the prettiest lady you ever saw, Miss Thorne?" murmured Matt Moody.

"She's very, very lovely, Matt. I don't know—I suppose there are prettier women, but I

don't know one so fascinating. I've never seen her dressed for swimming before. Just wait till she drops that cape. You'll think she's Atalanta," said Eleanor Thorne.

"I've never been far South as that," explained Matt. "Never been much of anywhere."

"What's that about Atalanta?" inquired Arthur Colfax, emerging from the house. He had been quicker than his word. As soon as he had sent Dr. Lyle Kennedy after his cousin Judith, he himself had felt an unexpected ambition to stroll down to the beach with them. Now that they were a hundred yards away he allowed himself to linger, sitting on the arm of his deck chair and recovering his wind, still easily cut short. Strange how nervous breakdowns affected one's physical strength, he thought.

"I said Mrs. Kent would look like her when she runs down into the water—except that her hair won't be flying."

Matt Moody made a mental note. Miss Thorne had not meant the capital of Georgia. Instead, some woman. He had a great store of those mental notes by now.

At the edge of the beach the white woolly cape went to the winds. A slenderly rounded figure

in a black silk bathing suit of an artful cut ran lightly and fleetly down over the hard sands. Beside it dashed a tall form with sturdy white legs able to compass a tremendous stride. Both plunged into the surf, waded slowly out side by side, presently were slipping up and down the gentle combers and then swimming on out to the smoother water beyond the surf.

"If there's one particularly enjoyable way to get acquainted," observed Kennedy, floating on his back beside Judith Kent, also floating, both her warmly tanned arms outspread, her delectable profile just showing above the water, "it's—this way."

"Better than in the operating room," she responded. She was gazing up into unfathomable depths of the June sky. "Or by either delivering lectures or listening to them in a convalescent's hospital room."

"Much better."

"Still, I'll have to admit, if it hadn't been that, it couldn't have been this."

"I don't think it could, though I needn't necessarily have been the man to make this possible."

"I'm glad you were. One likes one's surgeons as one likes them. Did you know Miss Catesby

swears that if I'd been in less skilful hands I easily mightn't have come through to being able to swim in Wild Gull Cove?"

"There are plenty of hands as skilful as mine," he insisted, though his heart felt pretty warm.

"She thinks not so many. Anyhow, you get the credit, to my last days. I'm eternally grateful. I don't think I've actually said much about it. Miss Catesby made me terribly afraid of gushing over you. Her idea was that a simple 'Thanks, Dr. Kennedy'—with no tears—or hand clingsings—would suit you best."

He laughed. "She judges me by her austere but loyal self. But I don't object to being thanked by some people. And I don't mind owning that when the white cape dropped off on the beach back there I felt a great sense of satisfaction that I had helped preserve—to life and all life may mean—so lovely a being."

Lovely had been Eleanor Thorne's word, too. And it fitted.

It might have been the unexpected slightly higher wave which came along at the moment of using this high-powered adjective which made him choke a little exactly as he stopped speaking. At the next he looked over at her, smiling, and found her brown eyes between their

sunlight-narrowed lashes regarding him intently.

"What a dear thing to say!" she answered, plainly touched. It was so unlike her blunt surgeon, who, as she had said, had "lectured" her so often, to permit himself actually fervent words like these. "I shall remember it. . . . Should we turn about now, do you think? Not that I want to."

He turned his head and discovered that between swimming and floating they were considerably farther out than he would have advised as yet for his ex-patient.

"Of course we must. I'm afraid I wasn't noticing. It's rather a long way for you to make it in, comfortably. Suppose you put one hand on my shoulder."

"I can do it perfectly well without."

"Put your hand on my shoulder and let me do most of it, Mrs. Kent, please. We must get in before the tide turns, or it'll be a hard pull."

She rested her hand as he commanded in his tone of authority, and he swam vigorously while she took light strokes which made her not a heavy burden. They didn't talk much on the way in. There was a sense of intimate comradeship between them. Kennedy could have covered miles of the watery way with that hand resting

upon him, he thought. He hadn't imagined himself so susceptible to the touch of a woman.

They found Arthur Colfax splashing about in the surf. He was not much of a swimmer.

"I began to be anxious about you," he called to them, as they came floating in over the rising combers on a tide which had begun to turn. "But how I envied you! I don't know how, born and brought up in Cambridge, I missed learning to swim better than I do."

"You went in for honours, not athletics, didn't you, Arthur? But how much good the athletics would have done you!"

Judith came in a little breathless, and Kennedy made her sit down on the beach. Then he ordered her to lie on her back. The two men threw themselves down beside her, each on his stomach, legs in air, elbows digging into the sand. Judith pulled off her white rubber cap. Her thick, wavy brown hair, shoulder length, blew about her flushed and merry face. The men talked a little; she lay silent, listening.

Suddenly Kennedy sprang up. "My hat! I've lost all track of time. I must rush up and dress, and if it's late I'll dash for town without lunch."

"It's all laid, upon the porch. See Molly and Brennan up there, very busy? You'll have time

to swallow some of Martha's good food. We'll all go—and meet in seven minutes."

"Colfax—we'll join hands and carry her up those steps, eh! She's really had all she should have for one morning."

Eleanor Thorne and Matt Moody watched the progress up the steps. Judith, swung between the clasped hands and wrists, looked like some enchanting child. It made Colfax puff a little, but he wouldn't let Judith slip down till they were up the final steps which ended the journey.

Judith stooped over Eleanor's chair and whispered in her ear, "I won't go again till you can. It's a shame to tantalize you like that."

But Eleanor Thorne whispered back: "I wasn't minding. I've had an amazing talk with Matt." Her glance went smiling over to the boy, who smiled back as not even Judith herself had been able to make him. For a minute she couldn't understand. Then she could. Far apart as they were in all surface experience, these two had both been out in the world alone—and fighting. As Judith went on up to her room for her quick change she was saying to herself, "After all, what do I know about the things they do?" And in a way actually envied them at least a part of their experience.

XV

Guests depart. Who wants even the nicest guests around forever? There might be complications

ARTHUR COLFAX stood, hat in hand, taking leave of his cousin Judith.

"I can never tell what you've done for me in this one short fortnight," he said.

"I haven't done it. Rest and sunshine, exercise and change of thought are wholly responsible. You look like somebody healthily alive now, not like a jumping jack with the strings broken."

"Was that what I looked like?" he inquired with a cheerful grin.

"You did. And you're not to acquire that look again. Go back to your administration office and learn to take things as they come, not before or after."

"I'll try. You won't see me again for a long time, so I'll receive those as your parting words and not forget them. On my side, Judith, I'd like to say just one thing to you—pretty frankly. May I?"²

"Of course."

They were looking at each other closely. A real change seemed to have come over the departing guest. He was no longer limp and nerve racked; he was again a person of force, capable of giving advice as well as taking it. One could now easily imagine him as an executive and a keen one.

"I've somehow gathered that you've made a strike for independence. Independence is a fine thing, but it's not always as satisfying as partnership. Don't lose the one for the sake of the other. I know what loneliness means—I warn you against it."

"I don't know," said Judith, with her head high, "just how you come to infer all this, my dear Arthur. I can't recall that I've talked about myself and my affairs at all."

"You haven't. That's precisely why I know that something's happening to you. Probably you think I've no right to be either inferring or counselling. But you've given me some pretty stiff medicine this last fortnight, and I admit it's done me good. So now I'm giving you just a bit in return. If you're annoyed with me, I'm sorry. But the other day I overheard, without being able to help it, a bit of dialogue between

your maid Molly and your man Brennan. I'm going to tell it to you, as a parting gift, because I think you should know."

"Thank you. Do. If you consider servants' talk a thing to take note of."

He smiled gravely. "It is sometimes, Judith. Listen to this. Molly said, '*But the Doctor's only her friend, Billy. What's the harm in that?*' And said Bill in reply—it was the tone, Judith, that made me wince—'*Friend—me eye!*' That was all. I wanted to knock him down. I couldn't. But I can warn you. I'm not blaming you or accusing you. You simply don't know what you're like—or if you do see yourself in the mirror you still don't fully recognize your powers. Why, even I—I freely confess it—couldn't stay near you much longer without losing my head, and that in spite of what I thought I felt for that poor girl. You're—well—perhaps I'd better not say what you are. Upsetting to the judgment—and that doesn't half cover it. . . . And now I'm going to kiss you and say good-bye. And I'll remember the kiss, because I'm only human."

She was staring at him as though a favourite and hitherto gentle dog had suddenly leaped at her and torn her.

"I think you'll not kiss me good-bye," she said, very coldly.

"Very well. Not even as a cousin?"

"No."

"See here, Judith." His manner changed. "Forgive me if I've been too plain with you. I only wanted to do you a kindness—make you realize a thing or two. Women like you hold everything in their hands. You've made me well in this fortnight. You could make me ill again in another fortnight without meaning to at all. That's all. Good-bye, dear. I thank you with all my heart."

He didn't turn to look back at her as he went out to the waiting motor and Brennan. But she looked after him, with something in her eyes which was half pain and half respect—and wholly amazement.

Eleanor Thorne, after her three weeks' stay, had gone, also. She, too, seemed quite restored by the short vacation. She was deeply grateful, and had said so, charmingly, in her soft, low voice.

"Mrs. Kent, it's been paradise out here. I'm all made over new. Nobody but you would have even thought of doing such a thing."

"Nonsense, my dear! After three years of

your breaking your pretty neck to make me satisfied and to get things out on time, one little visit out here is only a tiny recognition of my debt to you. Besides, I've enjoyed you tremendously. You know you're no ordinary person."

Miss Thorne certainly didn't look like an ordinary person. The period of rest had smoothed the weariness out of the pale, unusual face; put light again into the eyes which Judith had long thought beautiful. There was real individuality about this young woman, undoubtedly. With her background of education she was by no means negligible. Even Dr. Kennedy, meeting her several times during her visit, had admitted in response to Judith's questioning that Miss Thorne interested him because of the conflict between his knowledge of her employment and his recognition of her cultivated mind.

"But in an age when even the last season's débutantes, bored with life and eager for a new sensation, begin to look about them for amusing and lucrative jobs, why should anybody underestimate the qualities of a young woman just because she chooses to create gowns instead of statues?"

"Nobody should. In this case you are perfectly

right. It's been delightful to watch the very engaging personality of your friend emerge from the concealing garment of her fatigue. You have a right to be proud of the way you have poured the lifeblood back into both your cousin and this friend. Aren't you almost ready to admit that the interest in individual benefactions is more than equal to that in the group charities you've been so absorbed in?"

"Each in its way," had been all the admission he could get from her. But when she was driving with Eleanor Thorne into town on the morning of her return, she was conscious of a strong satisfaction in the sight of her companion's renewed appearance of health and vitality.

"You ought to be going to Paris, you know," Judith said, "on the very next ship. I thought you always did that in the summer."

"I know. But I couldn't manage it this season. There have been obligations unexpectedly large. I don't think it matters. I'm always glad to get the latest impressions over there, but really the books and sheets sent out are bridging me over very nicely without this summer's trip. And after all, you know, I don't follow the other designers' ideas too closely."

"No, why should you? I've loved the things you've made for me much more than anything I ever bought abroad. They're so original and clever—even daring—yet never eccentric or out of key."

"That's lovely of you, Mrs. Kent. And—may I tell you that I've had more real joy out of planning things for you than for any client I ever had?"

"Really? I do appreciate that, my dear. And I'm sorry to have you leave me now. If it hadn't been for that midsummer wedding—— But I'll have you out again when all the bridal frocks are done."

Yes, it *had* been a satisfaction to bring back the life and courage to so intelligent and talented a person as Eleanor Thorne.

There were others, as the summer advanced. Having tried it, Judith took increasing pleasure in putting to use, for a night or two at a time, the breezy, comfortable guest rooms at her disposal. They were not all beggars or choosers who came to her door; now and then it was an old friend whom she had out, purely for her own sake.

She came to know many of the people in the

smaller houses and cottages. With Father O'Flynn, Lyle Kennedy's friend, she spent many an hour; sometimes she had him brought up, as Kennedy had suggested, to spend an evening with her, while she and Matt made music for him. When a tragedy occurred in the home of an old fisherman, down by the shore, she and Brennan were there within the hour. She made herself, in so far as possible, a part of the life of Wild Gull Cove, while at the same time, inwardly, and in spite of herself, she remained aloof from it.

The comments of the Listening Post were shrewd.

"You'll have to hand it to her, she does her best to be a good mixer. And she doesn't like mixin', either, if I know the signs. She'd rather sit at her desk and give big orders—the way she always has—than stop at cottages an' ask how the baby is."

"You can't blame her for that," was Molly's instant answer to Brennan's observation. "But she does ask beautifully about the babies. You should see the looks on people's faces when she stops to speak with them. She's like a princess, and yet that kind."

"She was born kind. She's too kind," said Martha. "But not to the right one."

"Meanin' Mr. Rawley Kent?"

"Meanin' Mr. Rawley Kent, Brennan. It's everybody but him these days."

So it seemed.

XVI

Another letter, which purports to be written with the utmost candour but falls a little short. It is difficult to maintain utmost candour in a letter. One might tell too much

IT WAS not long after this that Judith had a second letter from her husband. It was an even more restrained letter than the first, as far as the relations between them were alluded to, but it gave many enlightening details of his new life. At the close it mentioned with some humour his humiliation, after all his years of riding in the East, at having been thrown by a new horse which had looked to be as innocent as a cow in a pasture. He said that his friend Dave had derived infinite amusement from the incident, but none the less had taken great care of the swollen and painful shoulder, and that altogether the affair had resulted in many stimulating evening hours spent in the company of his young manager, for which he—Rawley—should be forever the richer.

Judith replied to this letter, quite against

her first intention, without much delay. After all, one couldn't ignore the news of an accident to one's husband even though he made light of it. All her life she had been trained to respond to the hearing of even slight illness with a sympathetic note and a gift. Why not in the case of Rawley? It was mere decent manners. Therefore:

DEAR RAWLEY:

You wrote much too promptly, of course, but it was such an interesting letter I shall have to forgive you. And I am writing back much too promptly, but that is because you owed to that injured shoulder, and I know how it feels to be lying idle. I am ordering a book or two sent to you which may amuse you and while away a few hours.

Time goes a little faster than when I wrote before. Dr. Kennedy comes out every few days to see Matt Moody. He stays on to see me. I mean to be perfectly frank with you, Rawley. If I am to write to you at all I shall tell you the exact truth about things, for only so can we discover how we actually feel toward each other.

Dr. Kennedy is an unusual man, not only in his profession but out of it. I enjoy our long

talks together, on the beach or inside by the fire if the day is gloomy. He has a little place which, man fashion, he calls a shack, down on the shore, a quarter of a mile away. Sometimes he spends the evening with me and then goes there for the night. He says he never feels so fit for work next morning as after a night out here by the sea. He's tremendously overworked, and more than once he has fallen asleep in spite of himself on my big couch by the fire, though he came for an evening of talk.

He and Matt Moody get on wonderfully—the Doctor takes such pains to draw him out and to get him to talking about music, which we all enjoy. Often I play to them, and Matt, who is just beginning to use his fiddle, draws a few tentative notes very softly, joining in with me. Harmless enough, these evenings are, but delightful, without a particle of sentimentality about them. I don't know how long they'll continue. It seems that Matt has some slight and not permanent injury to the spine, which it may take two or three months to recover from. Of course he might be in a hospital. But really, his staying here, and my sense of being of use to somebody while I'm marking time, is what keeps me from bolting. And Miss Catesby is

most awfully good for me, too. In spite of all my activities, I've really led a life of ease and comfort, while she—well, when I've heard one of her grim stories of her own past experience, or that of others she has known, I realize how little, in spite of all my information regarding the condition of the poor, I really understand of the poverty of the spirit which is so much worse than any lack of money.

I must go and take my morning dip. I suppose you take yours in some clear mountain lake or stream. I love to go in best when the surf is high and the sky heavy and gray with threatening clouds. A real storm always tempts me, but as yet I haven't yielded. Between Miss Catesby and the rest of them I should probably be haled back from the very brink. Brennan considers himself a bodyguard. If the water is at all rough I usually see him strolling along the cliff.

My cousin, Arthur Colfax—you remember him, of course—turned up not long ago, on the edge of a nervous breakdown, and I kept him for a little till he was fitter to go back to the small college of which he is the too young president. Also, I have had here a little dressmaker of mine from the city, Eleanor Thorne, resting from overwork. A few other people, for week-

ends, who needed a change. Somehow these small benefactions console me somewhat for the loss of the bigger things I've left behind. But I shall be back at those in the fall—I've got to be. You will understand that, I know. Meanwhile, I suppose I'm laying up stores of reserve.

As ever—no, not that, because I'm not exactly as ever. Something has happened to change that. I can't even sign myself "Yours," for perhaps I'm not—or rather—I don't know whether I am. So—abruptly—to stop fussing over it,

JUDITH.

When the letter was finished it occurred to the writer that as a message of sympathy it might cause more pain than it allayed. But it was her intention to be honest, as she had said, and in accordance with that resolve there was no leaving Lyle Kennedy out. His car was driving up to the door at that very minute. She put the letter hurriedly into its envelope, addressed it, and sent it off.

XVII

*Calls from one's friends, who come to question, listen—
and go away to talk. This is one of the especial func-
tions of friends*

"BUT, Judith darling, it's just unthinkable that you couldn't do it. My dear, you can't be spared."

"Doctor's orders, Alma. You needn't think I'm not as sorry as you."

"But you're the picture of health—simply the picture! I've been envying you ever since I came in the door."

"So have I."

They had brought the breath of her old life with them, these two visitors, even as they appeared at her door. Two charming young women, perfectly dressed, their motor waiting outside. Mrs. Rex Sylvester, Mrs. Hamilton DeForest, Judith's closest associates in many of her former activities. They were clever, eager, capable, generous; she was very fond of them both. She looked from one to the other, and enjoyed

their exquisite looks, their smiles, their low, persuasive voices.

As for herself, she couldn't blame them if her excuse of doctor's orders seemed to them a lame one. She was indeed the picture of health. Sunburned, looking as she always had in the gay colours of her sports clothes, the rakish tilt of her light felt hat, like a lively girl ready for any strenuous exercise. It must indeed seem incredible to them that she couldn't do the thing they asked of her, the thing she had done so many times in the past, and done with such apparent ease.

"You know it's going to be a really important occasion, and an amazingly interesting one. It's *the* event of the summer, out there at Mrs. Wellington's. The setting will be gorgeous, everything will lead up to your appearance, and—why, in the open air like that, it *can't* overtire you. And *think* of the cause!"

Alma Sylvester's eyes were shining with the ardour of her wish. Frances DeForest took up the tale. Indeed, it had been an antiphonal argument from the beginning.

"Of course, you do think of the cause, dearest, we know that. But—consider how easy it will be. As Alma says, the being in the open air will

make all the difference. We couldn't urge you to get into one of those crowded indoor assemblies that come later—or not until your doctor thinks you fit. But I'm sure even he couldn't object to this outdoor affair. Why, it should actually be a benefit to you!"

"You know it's harder to speak in the open air," Judith reminded her.

"We'll have an amplifier, then. Oh, my dear, it isn't *like* you to hold off so when so much is at stake. If you could see those poor children—and there's nobody who could speak for them as you can—nobody!"

"Fran, I do see them—you know that. It's just that I've given my word. And if I should break it I'd let down the barriers, you know I should. A lot of people would be after me—I should have no excuse. 'You did it for Mrs. Wellington,' they'd say. 'But you won't do it for anybody less socially prominent.' And they'd have reason on their side in thinking that."

"Oh, my dear!" Tears almost stood in Frances DeForest's fine eyes. "You *know* we don't want you to have another breakdown, Judy. Only—just this once—how could it hurt you?"

"We really shouldn't say any more." Mrs.

Sylvester's quiet tone of understanding and acquiescence was harder to bear than Mrs. DeForest's persistence. "It's hard to give you up, Judith darling, but of course we will. Dr. Kennedy must know, or he wouldn't be so arbitrary about it."

"Judy!" Frances DeForest broke in once more. "You don't think—if we asked him to come—and he could bring you himself——"

Judith suddenly wondered. Just what did Frances mean by that? Neither of them had mentioned Judith's husband, and yet both had known him for years. Why hadn't they? And why should Lyle Kennedy's bringing her himself be a bribe to him to let her come—or, at least, why should they think so? She straightened herself, speaking lightly yet with a note of finality in her voice.

"He's not so easily bought off. Just cross me off the books for the present, Alma, please. And present my most genuine regrets to Mrs. Wellington, won't you? It was so nice of her to want me."

After they had gone she continued to think about them. She knew they would think about her—and talk about her. Friendship seldom prevented that. She could hear the voices, at some

tea table in the country—in some familiar group.

“Don’t you think it’s *quite* odd, Judith Kent’s being sent off by herself like that for the whole summer? And Rawley—heaven knows where. And Dr. Kennedy so devoted. Somebody—one of his nurses who’s taking care of Marie Lanier, told her he’s absolutely abstracted all the time. She *knew* it’s because of Judith.”

“Of course, he’s supposed to go to see that sick boy she’s keeping there.”

“Oh, yes—a beautiful excuse. If I know anything of these prominent surgeons they don’t often motor thirty miles out of the city to see their patients, once they’re convalescing, as I understand this boy is. They send an assistant.”

Smiles and meaning looks. Judith could see them.

“Anybody have the least idea where Rawley is?”

“Nobody. And one doesn’t dare mention him to her.”

“Of course, it’s a smash-up. That’s usually the way, with these people who start in so mad about each other.”

Oh, yes, Judith said to herself, she was being talked about. It wasn’t only Molly and Martha and Brennan, it was Alma and Frances and

Marie Lanier and the rest of them. The suggestion that Dr. Kennedy would let her appear at Mrs. Wellington's if he might bring her himself showed that. A simple enough thing that would be under ordinary circumstances, and if they weren't beginning to suspect that there was a real break between the Rawley Kents. But now that they did suspect it gossip would be rife.

But she wouldn't stop Lyle Kennedy's coming. Why should she? If ever there was a friendship between man and woman above reproach, it was theirs. Nobody should interfere with it. He was so fine, so intelligent, so stimulating—when he wasn't worn out. And when he was . . . Well—why shouldn't he come to her for rest and peace? . . . Besides—she was lonely. Arthur Colfax had used that word. One couldn't be taken out of life the way she had been and be expected to live in a nunnery. Even Rawley couldn't expect that. Or if he did, what did it matter? They were miles apart, and she couldn't travel alone through life.

XVIII

*Unexpected and breath-taking news from Montana.
But what else could have been expected from a situation
like that?*

Two letters in the evening mail from Rawley —after a silence of a full month. Judith had a queer sensation as she looked at them lying in her lap. She didn't want to open them at once. One was dated exactly a day ahead of the other, yet they had reached her in the same mail. Which should she read first? The later one, perhaps, to have the later news. No, the other, to keep them in their logical order. Finally she opened the one of the later date, without knowing exactly why, and found there had been a real reason, perhaps subtly communicated to her by the writer.

DEAR JUDITH:

I am hoping this letter may so nearly catch up with the other that before the first has had time to shock and displease you, this second,

accurately representing those supposedly wiser second thoughts, may have come on its heels to reassure you. I rode fifteen miles to try to get the first letter out of the mails, but was too late. This I am scrawling at the station on paper lent me by the station agent.

You have often called me a dreamer. I want you to know that I was dreaming when I wrote the other letter. I was out alone on our long, wide porch, and the evening was unbearably beautiful. Dave was away, Bumpy sleeping in the bunkhouse. I sat and stared into the night world, the night sky, until I was fairly unbalanced by the wonder of it. My loneliness got the better of me. I went inside at midnight and wrote that letter. When I woke in the morning I knew I shouldn't send it, but it had already gone. Dave had returned unexpectedly in the night and set off again at daylight. He had seen the letter lying with two others I had written the day before and had taken them all along to catch the morning mail.

Since I can't get it back it will have to hit you between the eyes. Unless—by some possible chance the two should arrive together; in which case, if you read this first, you can send the other back or burn it without reading. If you don't

read it I wish you would let me know. I should be glad to find that you will never know how far I had broken my promise to write you no self-revealing words during this strange year of experimentation on our unhappy situation. If you do read it, I can only tell you I'm sorry. Just remember that it's getting mailed at all was an accident.

The sun is bright this morning. When I post this I shall be off to talk over plans for enlarging the ranch house. It's a truism that in the daylight one sees more clearly than at night. I'm quite sane this morning and have plenty to occupy me. I can wish you nothing better than that state of mind—and something interesting to do. So sign myself, reasonably,

RAWLEY.

Well! Should she read the other letter or should she not? It seemed quite clear that he did not wish her to and would be immensely relieved if she told him she had burned it unread. Would he? Obviously that other letter was one which bared his real feeling toward her. Was she in honour bound to let it go unread? Naturally she now wanted to know its contents more than she had wanted anything in a long time.

If it had come by itself she would have read it—yet . . .

“No, of course I won’t read it,” she said to herself, and put it at one side. “I’ll mail it back to him unopened. . . . Theatrical! . . . I’ll burn it and tell him so. . . . But reading it would certainly throw some light on what we’ve set out to discover. If I read it without any emotion that will prove something. . . . If I don’t read it at all I shan’t know how I would have felt. . . . I ought to read it. . . . But I’ll wait till I’ve read these other letters—some of them probably important.”

Upon which she opened Rawley’s letter.

JUDITH, MY DEAR:

Before I go to bed, alone in the ranch house, I find myself impelled by a force I can’t resist to write to you as I want to so very much to-night. I probably won’t send the letter. But after half a year’s absence from you I must let myself go—or break. A man can’t stand such a combination of loneliness and loveliness as I’ve been torturing myself with for hours to-night. You and I have been together in Switzerland, in Italy, in all sorts of places about the world on nights

like these, but I swear the scene from this Montana ranch-house porch to-night, under the full moon, is beyond them all. It may seem so because with you near me I couldn't half appreciate the wonder of some of those other scenes. But here alone, staring out at it with my pipe dead in my mouth because I forgot to relight it, such beauty to be looked at *without* you is, as I have said, unendurable torture. I won't endure it. I'll write everything out. Maybe that will ease the pain. I can burn the sheets afterward.

I know, my dear, that there's an inexcusable strain of weakness in me. I've owned to that before. I ought not to be floored by a summer night in Montana. I ought to be sitting here looking over Dave's accounts, my engineer's reports, my builder's recommendations. Those done I should settle down with a freely burning pipe, book in hand, slippers on feet, supremely contented, and yawning presently and going off to bed like a red-blooded man whose muscles and brain are healthily tired by the day's work or play. Well, I've been doing just that, more or less of the time, till I've built up rather an amateurish reputation for energy. But I don't deserve that reputation. I've been forcing myself

to earn it. What I really am is this mad dreamer who can settle to no real work because his arms are empty.

Judith—have I got to do without you? If you had died I should have braced myself somehow to meet the awful grief of it. But this having you alive, and still lawfully mine, yet thinking of you as though you were already gone out of my life, is playing havoc with my senses. I am nowhere—I can get nowhere. Pride ought to keep me from admitting it, even in a letter I don't mean to send, and which is only being written to relieve the heavy pressure I don't know how to stand.

Over at one of the big ranches, a few miles away, is a woman we both know. You think she is abroad—so does her world. She intends to stay the season out, there. She is the sort who will do anything for the sake of a new thrill. She would come here and stay if I'd let her. She is the centre of interest at that ranch. Most men find her tempting. If I don't, urgently, as yet, my dear, it's because I haven't yet let go of you. I'm only human, Judith. I love you devotedly—I still long for you in hours like this. But I can't go on this way—I can't. I'd like to play the strong man for your sake, but I'm not

strong. Fill my days as I will, I can't find enough to do to tire out my brain and stop its thinking.

She comes by, riding, and stops. She's a picture to fill the eye and knows it. I can't avoid her—if she doesn't find me one day she does the next. She's young—only a little older than you—she's gay, she's desirable. And she's nobody's fool. She can talk as intelligently as any woman I know, of almost any age. But when she stops talking and looks at me—and comes a little nearer—and I know I'm in her mind as a man she wants—Judith, it's the devil not to play up to her, I swear it is. Until I married you I'd have done it at the drop of the hat. Of course I do play up—I'll admit that—to a certain extent; but with what reserve I can command. No man can act like a block of ice when a pretty woman shows she likes him. But on my honour, as yet I've given her nothing to go by, as to whether I am even interested in her. She understands that fencing with the buttons on the foils is one thing; with the points bared it's quite another. And she knows the buttons are still on the foils.

But—can I keep them on? I swear I will—for this year, as I promised—if my will holds out. It was you—only you—I was thinking of to-night, Judith, in the midst of all that magnifi-

cent blackness shot through with light. If I could know that you're not lost to me, that we could go back to those first years when you didn't care what happened outside our own little world—this woman I'm telling you of could put her arms around my neck and I'd undo them and push her away. But not knowing . . . some time an hour may come . . . I don't mean to threaten you.

The Sunday edition that came in yesterday showed particularly fine rotogravures of that great costume ball for the sake of the Crippled Children. I looked them through, not imagining I'd find you, but naturally interested in seeing the people I know dressed up to the eyes in their most effective war paint. I thought you weren't doing that sort of thing now, by doctor's orders. Then I came on you and your partner. Mrs. Rawley Kent and Dr. Lyle Kennedy, as something or other out of the Seventeenth Century, I didn't bother to notice what. You were a stunning pair. Your doctor, for all his busy life, finds time to make himself cavalierish and to look the part. A nice face, looks like a man, in spite of the ruffles and knee breeches. I'll say that for him. But that didn't make me feel any the less like shooting him. As for you—no, I

didn't know you could be so beautiful as that, for any other man, Judith.

You see I *am* letting myself go. And yet I'm not. I can't. If I actually set down—if I could set down—the thoughts that crowd my mind—I'd go quite out of it. So I'm going to put a curb on myself and stop.

To-night I think I may as well mail this letter and give you the straight truth, just as it stands—as much of it as you can find here. But since it's midnight, and no mail can go till morning, I'll put the sheets in an envelope and seal and address and stamp it, as if it were going to you. Then, if morning brings another mood and I can be sure that I'd be defeating my own ends by sending it, I'll throw it in the fire myself.

But at least I can give myself the moment's satisfaction of signing myself, as I have so many times in these years,

Yours only, Judith,

RAWLEY.

She read the letter three times over before she put it back into its envelope. Then she sat thinking about it. Once she got up and went over to her dressing-table mirror and gave her face a long scrutiny. It gave her back the grave reflec-

tion of a very lovely woman. Young—she looked younger even than she had when Rawley went away, for the weeks in the hospital had given her a chance to rest tired nerves and build up a blood supply which the months by the sea-side had augmented. Her cheeks were rich with a warm colour.

“Who that we both know is out there,” she pondered, “that I supposed to be abroad? So many answer that description. It’s not much of a description—he didn’t mean to make it one. A picture to fill the eye—‘young, gay, and desirable.’”

Their past social life had been full of girls and women like that. Of course, the one of them all most daring, where nearly all were daring, was Natalie Vickers, to whom, long before Judith herself had seen much of Rawley, he had been reported to be engaged. It was at least certain that he had been much seen with her, and that when he had married Judith Cunningham, Natty Vickers had not gone to the wedding.

She was a woman who might make a powerful rival, though until the present moment Judith had never thought of any woman as a rival. Rawley had been so devoted, so apparently almost dependent for contentment upon having

his brilliant young wife near by, it had never occurred to her to imagine that that constancy, unusual in a man of Rawley's good looks and graces, might wane. Even when he had gone away for the year of experimental separation she had been so sure of him it had seemed to her that it was really only her own feeling which was to be put to the test. Now, suddenly, she had another possibility to look at.

She looked at it, off and on, for several days. She didn't mean to answer her husband, because of the suggestions of his letter, any sooner than usual. She didn't in the least know what she should say when she did reply. One thing she couldn't get away from: she couldn't be entirely indifferent to the idea of Natalie Vickers out in Montana, riding by Rawley's ranch house, stopping to talk with him, looking meanwhile as Natty could look on a horse—or anywhere else—the very spirit of mischief. Even stiffly correct riding clothes couldn't take that away. And even though she were patiently pursuing Rawley, she would do it with such an air of being merely amused by the whole thing, he wouldn't be revolted. And hadn't he admitted frankly that the presence of this imp was making the situation decidedly less bearable, precisely because it

was making it more interesting and challenging?

How far was it to go, this year upon which she had insisted? A full six months yet. It was now August. At the latest she didn't suppose that Easterners at the Western ranches stayed later than a possible first of October, though she didn't really know. She supposed Natty Vickers had money enough and persistency enough to stay on anywhere if she happened to want to. In any case, with Rawley as her quarry, she would undoubtedly be there weeks yet. And the mountain scenery in that marvellous Montana moonlight wasn't going to grow any less enchanting or make an exiled husband any less lonely. If there were no women at all around there would be an entirely different situation. With a congenial man friend Judith supposed a man who seemed to have put travel out of his plans and was electing to spend his whole year in that out-of-the-way place might be entirely content. . . . But with Natty Vickers using all her arts—not so easy.

Yet what was she—Judith—to do about it?

XIX

The Listening Post becomes seriously disturbed. It would like to know more than it can find out. What can be more trying?

BRENNAN and Molly were strolling along the hard, smooth sands of the beach at ebb tide. Mrs. Kent was in town to-night; Brennan had taken her in in the afternoon and left her, according to her instructions. A friend would bring her out the next afternoon. That would be Dr. Kennedy, Brennan supposed. He had turned his car toward Wild Gull Cove in a hurry. There would be time to take Molly out for a good long drive. He stopped by a candy shop and bought a big box of chocolates, good ones, too; none of your cheap stuff. Then off and out, making record time of the trip.

Something had to be done. Harry Casey had come out twice to see Molly during the last week, instead of sticking to his regular Sunday schedule. Billy Brennan was worried. He could never find out just how much Molly thought of Harry, no matter how hard he tried. She was a

sly one, that girl. Making them both think she thought her eyes of them, in that laughing way of hers that never committed her to either of them. Well, he was going to show her a good time himself, with all the hours between four-thirty and midnight to do it in. Martha would scold—let her scold. He guessed he had some rights himself.

But Molly wouldn't go. After all his hurry, and for all the box of chocolates under his arm when he asked her, she wouldn't go.

"I'm not going joy riding in her car, Billy Brennan—unless you asked her, and I know you didn't. *Did* you, now?"

It was impossible to lie with Molly's truth-telling eyes upon him.

"She wouldn't care. She likes them that have few pleasures to get 'em when they can. Don't be foolish. Come on, and I'll blow the curl out o' your hair."

"No. Quit your asking. I'll walk on the beach with you this evening, maybe."

"Maybe I'll not ask you to." Brennan was enraged with disappointment, or he wouldn't have risked this bluff.

"Oh, just as you like. I'm not crazy to go. Nothing would make me go now, anyway."

She turned on her trim small heel and left him.

But he got her to go. He coaxed Martha, by methods of his own, to serve Miss Catesby and Matt Moody half an hour early. That made the evening to come look long, and by the time Molly was free there was a gorgeous sunset. Brennan untied her crisp organdie apron strings.

"You don't have to wear a uniform on the beach," he said, and lifted off her wisp of a cap. "Now, go slip on that yellow dress you keep for Sundays that makes your hair look like somethin' alive. And then come along."

It was a clever compliment, and since she wanted to go anyway, Molly laughed herself into the yellow dress, and tinted stockings and slippers as well, reckless of what walking on the beach and over the stones would do to them, and went off with Brennan.

It was on the sands, after much rallying and gaiety, that they settled down in the gathering dusk to talk things over.

"I wish," said Molly, with her copper hair against Brennan's shoulder—it was as far as she would let him go with her, and no kisses at that—or maybe just one, when they should part at the house. Brennan would have given his eyes to know whether Harry Casey ever got

more than that. He didn't think so. Molly loved to play with them both, he was sure of that. But he had often noted the unsatisfied look on Casey's face when he left, in spite of Molly's laughing "Good-bye, and don't come again if you don't want to," which was so patently an invitation to come again.

"What do you wish?" Billy inquired, when she had let a considerable silence fall upon those two words. "I'll bet you wish a lot of things."

"To-night I wish," Molly went on slowly, "I knew some way to bring Mr. Kent back. He ought to be coming back."

"You bet he had. No man ought to go off and leave his wife to do what she likes. He won't find her where he left her, maybe, when he gets back. If they'd had a holy row it would be different. Folks get over rows and go on again. But they just walked away from each other, cool as clams. It don't look good to me."

"It don't to me, either, Billy. It worries me. And them so taken up with each other, ever and ever so long after they got married, they couldn't see anybody else. And now Dr. Kennedy always with her. I'd give a lot to know, this minute, what Mr. Rawley Kent is doing."

"More'n likely he's gettin' along pretty

enough, wherever he is," was Brennan's philosophy. "If there's women there, you can bet your life they're makin' up to him. And there's women everywhere."

"I suppose so," Molly sighed. "But how she can let him go! Why, just to have Mr. Kent look at me and smile would make me happy for a day."

"Oh, it would, would it!" His arm tightened about her shoulder. "I always knew you were goofy about the master, but I didn't think you'd say a thing like that."

"Silly! You know I didn't mean—and me what I am—and him what he is."

"Well, and lots of men in their own houses give a girl like you a kiss behind the door when the Missis isn't lookin'. Did he ever do that to you?—Say!"

She tried to draw away from him.

"Say! Did he? If he did——"

"No, he did *not*. He isn't that sort, and you know it."

She was so angry that he had to take it back. He knew it wasn't true, anyway. "All right—I do know it. If ever there was a chap that held himself above you, same time he was bein' so nice to you, you had to like him, it was Rawley

Kent, *Es-quire*. Her, too. It's a way they've got. I don't think much of them that hasn't, either. If you're born to a position in life like they've got you have to live up to it. Nobody can try to copy it and get away with it."

"Billy, do you suppose Mr. Kent won't come back? Do you think they're going to separate, or get a divorce, or anything like that?"

"How should I know? As long as they write letters—— See here, why don't you get ahold of some of their letters, if you're so worried, and see how the land lies? She leaves 'em around, don't she?"

"Why, Billy Brennan!"

"Oh, come on! Why shouldn't you? You'd be doin' it out of kindness, wouldn't you? It wouldn't hurt anybody. I want to see Mr. Kent back as much as you do. Maybe there's something we could do. Slip him an anonymous letter, lettin' him know how Dr. K. comes round so much. Nothin' like makin' a man jealous."

Molly shook her head. "We couldn't do that. There's nothing to do but wait—and stay by her. Did you notice her when you took her in to-day, Billy? She looked just stunning but I didn't think she looked happy, one bit. I believe she misses him."

“And why wouldn’t she? He’s somethin’ to miss. Only I wouldn’t say any smile o’ his would make me happy for a day. There’s only one person’s smiles can do that for me, and hers light ’round on everybody in sight, so nobody can tell who she means ’em for.”

“Silly! Would you want me to go round looking gloomy?”

“You could look a little gloomier when you take Moody his tea. You’re a reg’lar sunburst then.”

“Oh, am I? And how do you know that, Mr. Brennan?”

“Same way all of us know anything about what goes on in the house—lookin’ and listenin’.”

There wasn’t much she could say to that.

XX

A brother comes into it. He comes as brothers do, striding in with spikes on his shoes

"JUDY! See here! I had to come and look you up. I haven't heard a word from you for weeks. Got worried, I swear I did."

Judith Kent held her brother Jerrold Cunningham by both arms—as he was holding her—while the two pairs of eyes, so alike in their look of something smouldering behind the dark lashes, regarded each other searchingly.

"I'm terribly glad you came, dear—glad you wanted to come enough to take the trouble."

"Why shouldn't I want to come? Haven't you and I been mighty close together always? When I struck the pier this morning my first thought was to find out where you were, and talk everything over. Because—well, I'll tell you when you've given me a room and let me take time to change."

"Of course. If you'd only let me know I'd have sent Brennan in for you."

"How should I know where to wire? I knew you wouldn't be at the apartment in August, and since you hadn't sent me any address my only way was to make a dash there this morning and see if they knew. As of course they did. And a jolly sort of place you've got here. Nice comfy bedroom with a sea breeze, eh?"

"Nothing less. All my bedrooms have sea breezes, for domineering guests like you."

She sent for Brennan to carry up Mr. Cunningham's ship-labelled luggage, but came along herself to see that all was right in the most charming of her three guest rooms. Jerrold approved his quarters heartily.

"Thanks, Brennan. Yes, unstrap them, please. . . . I say, Judy, this *is* a sweet big airy place after being cramped in a stateroom for seven days. Decided to come across too late to get anything faster. All right, and I'll be down before you want me."

It was after lunch that Jerrold and Judith had the talk which Jerrold had come for. He had demanded the car and the privilege of driving it.

"Haven't had my hands on a steering wheel for six months, Brennan. To be sure, I motored all over France—and the Continent—with a friend, but he was the sort of friend who never

invites *his* friend to drive his priceless car. Nice but tantalizing, eh?"

"I should think so, Mr. Cunningham. I'll have Mrs. Kent's car around in a jiffy. You'll find her in perfect shape, sir."

"What is she?"

"A Mercier, sir."

Jerrold whistled. He was barely thirty, and it still mattered to him not only what was the quality of the motor he drove but what happened to be its famous name.

"Good enough. Maybe you'll have to show me any special foreign tricks she has—never drove a Mercier."

"I'll be glad to, sir. She's as easy to handle as a baby, but she does have a trick or two, as you say, Mr. Cunningham."

By the time Judith had come out, Jerrold had mastered the "tricks." Brennan handed his lady into the front seat beside her impatient brother and closed the door.

"Thanks, Brennan." Jerrold slipped a goodly tip into a hand which expected it. "Tell the cook to have dinner absolutely on the tick—whatever the tick is. In spite of all I've been fed since I arrived I'm again starving."

"That'll be the sea air, sir," grinned Brennan, and as the car glided noiselessly away he went back to make a comment to Molly and Martha.

"Now! There'll be something doing around the place. He's got wind of things somehow. He's taking her off to tell her what he thinks about it, or I'm all off."

"What makes you think he knows anything?" Molly demanded.

"Something about the way he spoke when he first came in. Wanted to talk everything over with her, but was putting it off till he could get her by himself. Did it, didn't he—askin' for the Mercier first thing. It's the only way he could be sure of all the time he wanted. When they come back we'll know something by her face—whether she likes what he has to say to her."

"She never lets you know anything by her face," protested Martha. "What we know about her we don't know from her face. Always sweet and smooth and polite, no matter what happens. Before us, I mean. It's as any lady should be."

"It's harder for her to do that sometimes than others," was Brennan's astute reply to this, and Molly seconded him.

"Judy," said her brother, turning to look at her, "do you mind telling me—just where *is* Rawley? Yes, I know you said Montana, but that's pretty vague. Montana's a whale of a big state."

"You mean you want his post-office address?" She gave it, adding that it was twenty miles from his ranch house.

"Hear from him often?"

"Every few—weeks."

"Weeks!" Jerrold pondered it. Then he attacked. "See here, Sis. We've always been frank with each other. I'm going to ask you to be so with me now. Maybe it's none of my business, but I do want to know what you're willing to tell me—and maybe I want to know what you're not willing to tell me. Anyhow, I'm your only brother, as I don't need to point out, and I've somehow got this thing on my mind. You can't seriously resent that."

"No." Her smile at him was unresentful. "You always did want to know, Jerry dear. And there's nothing important I'm not willing to tell you, though there's nothing I *am* willing to tell anybody else."

"All right—that's like you. Well, then, in one tremendous question: What's wrong between

you and Rawley that he should be out in Montana, staying for months, and writing you only at intervals of weeks?"

"There may not be anything wrong between us," she began, but he stopped her with an unbelieving exclamation.

"Don't tell me that. Maybe I haven't seen you and Rawley together, as mad about each other at the end of three or more years' married life as at the beginning. I haven't seen you for the last year, though. It must all have happened in this year. No signs, when I was with you last, of your taking a big vacation from each other or ever wanting to."

"There were signs, though, Jerry, as long as a year ago—longer. We—covered them, of course."

"They're uncovered now, all right. Your friends all understand it's a separation, and they expect it to end in divorce. You knew that, of course."

"I didn't. How should you know yourself? And why should they jump at conclusions?"

"My dear, there's nothing people do jump at quicker than conclusions. I jumped at this one myself, with no more ground than Virginia Burchard's dropping a hint, on the way across,

that Rawley wasn't to be expected back right away. Of course, it was the way she said it that made me think odd things."

"Virginia Burchard? What does she know about it? I hardly know her."

"That doesn't make much difference," Jerrold asserted grimly. "In your set or out of it, or only on the edge of it, everybody discusses the affairs of those of as much prominence as you and Rawley. And I assure you it's all about, this rumour. When I tried a bluff by saying, 'His doctor did order him off for an outdoor life, then—he threatened to,' she came back at me with an incredulous smile and a flat, 'Oh, he was all about town the week before he went—nobody thought him ill. He was the picture of health when *I* saw him last.' Not much use to try to bluff her, especially since I was ignorant of the facts."

Judith was staring straight ahead, and her lovely profile, as her brother glanced at it, had a set look. When she spoke it was in a level tone which gave no certain indication of her actual feeling.

"It is a separation in the sense that we decided the only way we could get a clear view of ourselves and our future was to spend some time

apart. I've always had a very strong feeling that if married people would do that, from time to time, they could—well—take stock of their situation. They'd soon discover whether they had begun to grow apart or whether they only needed to look at each other from a distance to realize they couldn't do without each other after all."

Jerrold Cunningham settled back in his seat, letting the motor slow, and making a turn off the main highway into a less travelled route.

"I see," he said. "There's probably something in that. I've seen a good many married pairs I thought needed some such try-out. But not you and Rawley. You know, I can't get over my feeling about you two, that you came as near being perfectly mated as two people could in a world of misfits. I haven't been in any hurry to marry, but I've said to myself that I knew at least one case in which the dream we all have of complete union with another being who precisely fits our needs had come true. Somehow, I can't bear to give that up. Yet—if you and Rawley aren't even keeping up any sort of correspondence—that looks owly to me. Or was that part of the try-out—that you shouldn't?"

"Yes, it was. But we haven't kept it as liter-

ally as we set out to." She was thinking of that last as yet still unanswered letter.

"That sounds a little better. Or would, if—— See here, Judy—we may as well lay all the cards on the table before we really discuss this."

"Are there more cards to lay on the table?" Suddenly she recalled Arthur Colfax and his parting words to her. Was everybody worried about her—suspecting her?

Jerrold turned the car aside, off the road, and stopped it. He drew himself around in his seat to face her. His eyes, almost the counterpart of her own, looked almost sternly into hers.

"As I hinted to you just now, I overheard some gossip on the boat," he said, "just before we landed. I suppose my being your brother made them think of you, and Mrs. Burchard, after trying to pump me, was giving her friends her interpretation of my unwillingness to talk. Anyhow, what they were saying was that the thing was as broad as it was long, because while you were playing 'round with Dr. Lyle Kennedy Rawley was enjoying the society of that terrific man hunter, Natalie Vickers. They had just discovered that she was out on some ranch near him, instead of being abroad, as they had supposed all along. How they got hold of that

I don't know—only that the scandal mongers always do get hold of such facts if they are to be had. Especially if they can stir up a nice new sensation that way."

The colour in Judith's face had deepened at the mention of Lyle Kennedy's name. She answered low but tersely:

"I am not 'playing around' with Dr. Kennedy. He is merely a very good friend of mine."

"Oh!" Jerrold's smile was cynical. "That's the usual explanation, of course. It always starts that way, I believe."

She was instantly and furiously angry with him. "Jerry, how *can* you! How can you think me so silly? Was there ever—*ever*—anything about me to justify that insinuation? Haven't I always been straightforward? Am I the sort of woman to send her husband away for a year so that she might have an 'affair' with another man? Take it back!"

"All right, I do. No, you haven't been that sort of woman, though you've had a terrific lot of attention, always. But I've thought of you as square and fair as they make 'em. You've given me another fact, though. It was you who sent Rawley away? He didn't go of his own choosing?"

"He wasn't happy. I think he was glad to go."

"But it was your plan?"

She was silent. It was impossible for her to say that it was a plan of Rawley's making. Curiously enough, the phrase "sent him away" struck her for the first time as the exact representation of the truth. Until now she had managed to feel that they had arrived at the decision together. She recalled vividly enough his pale, tense face when he had taken leave of her—she could never forget that. But his complete acquiescence in her judgment, without more than one violent protest, had convinced her—because she wanted to be convinced—that he didn't consider himself as being exiled. Of course, his letters had revealed his loneliness for a time. She hadn't answered the one which told her of Natalie Vickers's presence in his neighbourhood—weeks had gone by since then. She hadn't been able to bring herself to answer it. Had she been unhappy over it?

The Listening Post could have told her that which she hadn't admitted to herself.

XXI

But why shouldn't the truth be told? Isn't that what truth is for? Most certainly, though people are all the time trying not to do it

SHE was roused from her thoughts—she had almost, for the moment, forgotten Jerrold's presence beside her—by his voice saying, with a note of pity in it:

“So the old chap is off there by himself, trying to play the game as a gentleman of his quality should—and with Natalie Vickers making it as hard for him as a girl of her kind can. And you—don't care. My Lord, Judith—I can't understand women any more than I ever could. They say it's the man who kisses and runs away—and tells. It looks to me, more and more, as if it's mostly the women. Especially the married women.”

That hurt—it hurt fearfully. She didn't deserve it; she knew she didn't. She turned upon him again.

“Jerry—I tell you I couldn't see our happiness

together—oh, we were happy, God knows!—I couldn't see it dimming. The lustre, the beauty of it—was off. I don't know how it happened. But it did happen, slowly at first, then faster. I couldn't see it go. Better a break like this, with a chance of renewing it, than going on as we were."

"And you haven't the least idea how it happened?"

She shook her head. "Not the least."

"Hadn't you better think that over?"

"Do you imagine I haven't thought it over—a thousand times?"

"I wonder," said Jerrold Cunningham, as if to himself, "how far it's possible to tell any woman, even one's sister, what you think about the reasons for her marriage being headed for the rocks. Especially if you're a bachelor yourself and not supposed to understand anything about women except how to give them a riotous time when you take them out."

"You may try to tell me," Judith said after a minute's silence. "But I know beforehand what you will say."

"What will I say?"

"That I've taken on too many outside interests—have given my husband less and less of

my time. It makes no difference how much I may have accomplished, how useful I may have been, you think I've gone my way and let him go his. . . . And that I oughtn't to have done it."

"So you prefer to make your own indictment. I might have expected that." Jerrold's mouth was humorous for a minute. "Expected it from a woman who's used enough to public speaking and discussions in drawing rooms and club rooms to know that making her own admissions more or less spikes the enemy's guns. Well, all right. What you've owned to is part of what I might have tried to say. Even so, the modern idea of marriage—which I subscribe to—is that of as much freedom as can be had in bonds. But what I'm wondering is whether you can afford to lose Rawley by getting so damned free of him. If you can, I can't."

She turned again toward him and saw actual pain in his face. He suddenly brought his clenched fist down on the steering wheel and pounded it. Between the sentences of what he presently went on to say his lips set themselves grimly. She had never seen him so stirred.

"You know Rawley Kent's always been what you might call fascinating to me. His being three years older than I made me, as a little chap, think

he knew everything. As we grew older and I followed him along through the schools till we both left Princeton to go to France when war was declared, I was still crazy about him. I don't believe you ever realized how crazy. And you've never heard half the history of the things we went through together over there. We swore, before we came home, we wouldn't tell 'em. We didn't want to. But I'm going to say to you right now that if you think you married a charming idler and that you've been the only one that's carried on an important life, you're mighty mistaken. There's been a reason for his idleness, and you've never known it. Because he wouldn't tell you. And never will. But I'm going to, though it's breaking my promise to Rawley. But it's time to break it if I can help to save his marriage."

She stared at him. He slid out of the car and stood beside it.

"Judy, dear," he said, his manner softening slightly as he regarded her astonished, grieved face, "I'm going to walk off down the road here a few minutes. I ask you in that time to try to analyze your feeling toward Rawley and discover whether there isn't just a little sense of superiority to him and disappointment with him

because he hasn't done much since he came back except cut the coupons and dream over his music—besides keeping on loving you. You married him because you couldn't resist his charm. Between you, you had all the money you needed or wanted. For two or three years that was enough for you. Then you got more and more drawn into this game of being prominent in all sorts of public or picturesque affairs, and you began, whether you knew it or not, to despise your husband——”

A muffled exclamation of protest reached his ears, but he went on as mercilessly—yet kindly, too—as a brother may.

“—whether you knew it or not—because, though he didn't need to work at anything, he *didn't* work at anything. I don't imagine that point ever came up between you. You're a gentlewoman, born and bred; Rawley's a gentleman of the same school—only he grew up before you did, and therefore his ideas mayn't be quite so advanced as yours—I doubt if they are. I don't believe you ever accused him of not being a regular fellow any more than he would accuse you of being a too modern woman. Without any quarrel at all, you two simply began, as you say, to grow apart. And when you sent him off

and took on this other man as your friend, a prominent surgeon who interested you because he was so eminent and skilful and all the rest of it, you set up a standard of comparison—probably without realizing it. But Rawley has grown less and less to you, till now you don't much care what happens to him. Think it over, my dear, and see if that isn't what—if you'll be honest with yourself—has actually happened."

He would have walked off down the road, as he had promised, but she was out of the car and after him. Her eyes were desperately unhappy, but she kept her voice as quiet as his.

"Jerry! . . . You must tell me this instant what it is that's been kept from me. I don't need to think over what you've said. I need to know what's behind your words. I can't think of anything else. Tell me."

He looked down at her from his slender height. He had always in outward appearance seemed younger than his years, but at this moment he seemed older. She hadn't known Jerry could be so grave.

He scanned her face, and for an instant he was forced to pay her tribute.

"Judith," he said, "you're one of the most unusual and fascinating women I ever saw, and

there's no reason why a brother shouldn't appreciate beauty and power like yours."

"It's no time for compliments, Jerry. Tell me."

"It can be told in a few words. Rawley had a wound in the head at Belleau Wood that he's never recovered from. He can't concentrate long on any serious business matter without getting confused. He wouldn't have married you if he'd dreamed the condition would persist so long. His doctor——"

"Who?"

"Dr. Alexander Symonds. You couldn't find a better."

"Of course not. Go on."

"Dr. Symonds ordered him long ago, and has kept repeating it, not to try to force himself to take on responsibilities. He advised his marriage, being sure that in due course he'd be entirely well. He was coming along splendidly about the time you began to get deeper and deeper into all those social labours. Then—why, can't you see, Judy, what it did to him to have you away so much, so absorbed in your own affairs? It was the most natural thing in the world that the more eager he grew to keep pace with you, be as busy as you at something worth doing, the

more it bothered him because he couldn't. It retarded his cure, that's all. You were innocent enough, but you did him the harm."

"But why—but why—wasn't I told?"

"You ought to be able to understand that. Your knowing would have made him self-conscious—he would have felt he was being watched. His chance to get over the thing was much better by himself."

"Jerry!" she looked at him piteously—"how do you know all this?"

"Because—from time to time we've talked about it. No, don't resent that—it was natural that since I knew about it when it happened I should have kept track of him. He could talk to me as he couldn't to anybody else, not even the doctor."

She was silent. Her heart was very heavy.

XXII

Somebody should be considered besides the principals in this play. Why not take up that poor smashed fiddler?

THE Listening Post agreed that Mr. Jerrold Cunningham had had something to say to his sister. Brennan, going in and out, serving the dinner, observed and afterward reported, when there was a chance for more than muffled whispers.

"They kept up the talk, of course—when I was in the room, anyways. She came down lookin' like a million, the way she does for dinner."

"She can," Molly put in, "even in the plainest clothes she has, that she wears out here. That little peach thing—I saw her—I always have to get her into it. And her tiniest string of pearls."

"If you want to talk about her clothes——" began Brennan irritatedly.

"Oh, I don't. Go on, please."

"Well, there's nothin' to tell. Only—there'd been words between them. He'd been talkin' Dutch to her. She wasn't feelin' good—not a little

bit. She took everything I served—and hardly ate a thing.”

“Neither of ’em did,” testified Martha, out of some disappointment. “And you tellin’ me he was so hungry he couldn’t wait for dinner.”

“He’d got over it. Oh, they were polite enough, and Mr. Cunningham told her quite a lot about what he’d been doin’ since he’d seen her. And she pretended to listen, but all the time you could see she wasn’t. She was goin’ over something in her mind. And if it ain’t her husband I’ll go out and run up an’ down the beach shoutin’ that it ain’t.”

“Oh, I do hope it’ll make a difference,” sighed Molly, staring out of the window as she wiped Martha’s dishes.

But there was a sudden change in Brennan’s thoughts. He had heard the sound of a motor coming in at the service gate. He took a look. Yes, it was Casey’s old car—and it was only Wednesday. He came close to Molly and whispered in her ear.

“That guy’s here again—second time since Sunday. There’s goin’ to be trouble between you and me if you don’t send him off early to-night. See?”

“No, I don’t see, Billy Brennan. You’re here

all the time, and if Harry wants to come twice a week—well—what's it to you?"

"You *know* what it is me. And there's Matt Moody, too, lookin' his eyes off at you. Thank goodness, he's too much of a wreck for you to notice—more'n you do."

"He's not a wreck. He's getting well. And I won't be told what to do by you, Billy Brennan."

She walked out of the room.

It was quite true that Matt Moody watched Molly as she came and went. He was half sitting up in a reclining wheel chair in these days, and he could read, write, or finger his fiddle. Miss Catesby had little to do for him after he was bathed and dressed in his loose gown in the morning, except to see that he made no exertion beyond the doctor's orders. From time to time she had protested that any attendant would do as well, but Dr. Kennedy had ordered her to stay, partly for her own sake.

"The Lord only knows when you've had a decent vacation," he had growled. "Take this as one. I won't have you wearing out earlier than you need to."

"If you're getting on at the hospital all this while just as well without me, then I guess

I've nothing to plume myself on," was her slightly grim reply.

"You know very well there's no one to equal you. But Miss Dane, Miss Shuler, and Miss Booth are giving me particularly good work, and you can be spared till Matt is through with you. Another month and we'll have him on his feet. But there's still another consideration. Mrs. Kent should have a companion here, and you fill that office. Isn't that enough for you?"

She knew well enough what he meant. His own frequent calls were by no means wholly professional. It was a good idea to have a nearly middle-aged and dignified person about the place in case the little seaside community began to gossip. So long as a trained nurse in her stiffly starched white uniform and cap was to be seen often going in and out, the visits of a doctor were to be accepted as necessary. Even though Mrs. Kent and Dr. Kennedy were now and again noted swimming out together through the surf, or sitting upon the sands under a great striped green-and-white beach umbrella, it was to be supposed that everything was as it should be. The nurse now and then joined them for a few minutes at a time. Father O'Flynn, whom everyone knew and respected, was sometimes

brought down by Brennan to lie in a deck chair with them. The priest, while jovial and friendly with everybody, certainly had his strict ideas about such matters; he wouldn't be deceived as to the wholly uncriticizable relations between these two. As for Miss Catesby herself, she could swear, if anybody asked her to, that the friendship between Dr. Kennedy and Mrs. Kent was as fair and open a thing of the kind as she had ever observed. Had there been any love-making between them, she, who went around on rubber heels, and was privileged to appear anywhere about the house at any moment, would have seen something of it. As to whether they cared too much for each other, that, of course, she couldn't tell. If they did—well—even so, and though she had seen too much of life not to be distrustful of human nature even at its best—she had a pretty sure instinct that they were both of too fine a calibre to let themselves go while there remained an impediment to their future together—if they really wanted a future together.

Casey had been there a long while that day. All the afternoon, in fact. It was a legal holiday. He and Molly had spent several hours together, off over the rocks. Brennan had kept a displeased

eye on them, whenever they were in sight—which was only part of the time. Matt Moody had kept a wistful eye on them, from his deck chair on the porch. But Molly sent Casey off earlier than he wanted to go. Not because of Brennan's displeasure, but for a quite different reason. Miss Catesby had gone to spend a few hours with an emergency case, down in one of the smaller cottages further along the beach. She had asked Molly to look after Matt when the time came for his supper.

"Off you go, Harry," Molly had said at five in the afternoon. "I've got duties at the house from now on till bedtime."

"What duties?"

"You shouldn't ask."

"I'll bet it's something to do with that white-faced fellow on the porch."

"He isn't white faced, he's pretty well tanned, lying in the sun so much."

"I saw the nurse going off when I first came. She hasn't come back. You going to take her place?"

"What's it to you if I am? If I'm ordered to do it that makes it duty, doesn't it?"

He had growled a good deal, but he had gone. It occurred to Molly to wish he had taken Bren-

nan with him. Brennan always seemed to know when she had a chance to spend ten minutes with Matt. She knew perfectly well that he was likely to have his eye and ear at those same doors through which the entire Listening Post obtained so much information. Well, what did it matter, since Matt always talked in a soft, low voice, and she herself, long trained to quiet ways in an employer's house, spoke even lower than Matt? Just the same, she was conscious of Brennan's probable near presence, and when she wheeled Matt in she carefully placed him at a point where the piano and a great mass of flowers in a bowl upon it shut off view if not sound from those overlooking doors.

"Had a nice day, Matt?"

"Pretty nice, Molly. But this is the nicest part of it, if you're going to look after me."

"I am. Mrs. Kent's away, and Miss Catesby said not to expect her till ten. Brennan's to help you to bed at nine. But—there's quite a lot of time between. You won't want me to spend it all with you."

"Won't I, though?—At least—if you want to."

He was, Molly thought, a remarkable combination of shyness and boldness. There was no shyness about either Brennan or Casey; plenty

of boldness, always. She enjoyed Matt's gentler ways, his more sensitive reactions to her moods, especially since it was easy to see that he cared more and more for every minute he had with her.

"Will you play for me, Matt?"

"Sure—if you like it without the piano. When Mrs. Kent plays with me I always think I'm nothing, beside her."

"She wouldn't think that. Why, she's just accompanying you, Matt. You have the principal part. She never puts her part ahead of yours."

"I know. But a fiddle all alone——"

"I love hearing the fiddle all alone."

"Wait till I've had my supper, then, please."

"So hungry?" She was a little disappointed.

"No. I just think—the fiddle's nicer when the room gets shadowy. I can play better. 'Specially—for you."

She went out to get his tray. She was to have a wonderful evening, if nothing happened to spoil it. Of course Matt would prefer to play when the great room was shadowy. That was when he and Mrs. Kent most often played together. But to-night it was to be just herself and Matt. The heart under the pretty bib of the organdie apron was stirring as not Billy Brennan nor Harry Casey had ever been able to make it.

XXIII

The fiddler fiddles again. But it's not fiddling, it's music. And how could anybody interrupt?

MOLLY took in Matt's supper and left him to eat it alone while she and Brennan and Martha had theirs. A crafty young person was Molly. If she took in a tray for herself, to keep Matt company, Brennan and Martha would hoot. So she stayed with them and let Matt wish for her—it was just as well. He would play all the more meaningly for her later.

The "shadowy time" indoors comes fairly soon in early September, with the big living room facing the east, and the sun long gone from that side of the house. By the time Molly had finished wiping the dishes she could wash her hands with a fragrant soap and slip back to a waiting Matt with his violin in his hand and know that the hour had come. Often as she had heard him play, she had never been alone with him, to have him play just for her. If only Brennan and Martha would keep away from that door. Anyhow, from

it they couldn't see either of the pair, and that was something. But she supposed Brennan would cook up some message for her; he'd try to break up the little party for two in some way. He'd been very grumpy at dinner.

She sat down by Matt—near enough so that by stretching out his arm he could touch her if he wanted to. How else should she hear his music properly?

"You look sort of like a picture, in that light," he murmured, as he tuned his instrument with his long, skilful fingers.

"Meaning I look better in half a light than a whole one?" Molly teased him.

"You know I don't. But if you could see yourself against that window you'd know you look like an angel—or a Madonna—or something like that. There's a reflection of the sunset in those clouds behind you—just enough to make a sort of halo for your head. I've seen things like that in big churches I've been in, to hear the music."

Imagine Brennan or Casey saying anything like that! Molly's voice was touched as she murmured an answer.

"Nobody ever said anything so nice to me before, Matt."

"I hope nobody else ever will." It was almost

a whisper. Certainly no members of the Listening Post could get it, away across the room.

Then, without further words, he began very softly to play to her. Whether her presence inspired him, or the whole twilight scene took hold of his fancy, Molly thought he had never played so beautifully before. She didn't miss the rich support of the piano for his music at all. Matt made his own support. Two strings at once he could manage when he wanted to secure depth of harmony. And his clear, sure solo tones were like a voice singing in the room. Molly sat breathless. To think of anybody's playing like that, just for her. She was accustomed enough to take Brennan's and Casey's attentions lightly, with a toss of her head, a mocking laugh, or a small, momentary surrender to urgent arms or demanding lips, to be followed as likely as not by a hard push from her own stout young arms, or a tingling slap across the cheek. Yes, she could joke with them, play for a bit at lovemaking, or scold them soundly and run away. But—with Matt it was different.

"What's that you're playing?" she whispered, when he came to a pause after long-drawn-out strains so tender and so appealing that poor Molly was quite undone.

"I never heard that before," she whispered.

"No—I guess you haven't. I—why—I made it up myself. It's not much, but I sort of like it."

"Like it! It's wonderful. Won't you—please—play it again?"

"Sure, if you want me to."

He played it again. Before he finished the tears were slipping down Irish Molly's cheeks, she couldn't have told why. She was happy, but she was sad, too, with a delicious sadness. She supposed it was the music. Speechless at its conclusion, she couldn't help giving a tiny sniff, because she didn't want to pull out her handkerchief. Instantly Matt laid down his fiddle and bow on the stand at his side. His hand reached out and touched hers, tried to gather it into his grasp. She was just too far away.

"Please come a little closer," he whispered, trying to turn his chair wheels.

She moved considerably closer. It was easy enough now for him to hold the firm, warm hand tight in his own, which was cold with excitement and nervousness, like that of many another young fiddler playing for his girl.

"Your hand's awfully cold."

"It always is when I play."

She put her other hand over it, to warm it.

In no time at all it was tinglingly hot. They were both silent. The room grew dimmer and dimmer.

"Are you crying?"

"Not now. I started to—when you were playing." Another tiny sniff.

"What made you?"

"The music was so beautiful, I couldn't help it."

"Sure you weren't pitying me?"

"Why, no, indeed, Matt. Why should I? Here you are, almost well."

"Yes—but I'm nothing but a fiddler. I didn't know but you felt sorry for me. I don't want anybody to."

"We haven't—not since you began to get well."

They were still again. The hand clasp became tighter and tighter. Amazing how strong his hand really was. Not as Brennan's or Casey's big hands were strong, but wirily, as a violinist's fingers were bound to be. He had been playing much lately, the exercise had brought back the wiriness to the slender hand. Molly loved the delicately powerful feel of it.

A door opened. Brennan's voice, trying to sound casual, but succeeding in being a trifle surly, broke in upon their silence.

"Want a light, don't you, you folks? It's gettin' dark in here."

In the instant of time before he switched on a flood of it the hands had flown apart. Molly's chin went up like a flash.

"Please don't turn the place into a prize ring with a flood light. Put that off and give us the reading light."

"This is better to see by," Brennan insisted, standing where he was, looking them over.

Now did Matt Moody show of what stuff he was made. He was indebted to Billy Brennan for much attention, which had steadily been growing more perfunctory. There was little friendship now between the two. Matt had not really understood, hardly imagining the big, handsome fellow's jealousy of himself, still a weakling who had to be helped to bed by other people. But now he did understand, to an extent to rouse something within him with which the making of music had no part. As Brennan stood there motionless, beside the switch which controlled all the side lights in the big room—seldom used because Mrs. Kent preferred the softer lighting by means of various shaded lower lamps—Molly jumped up, put on one small desk lamp, then ran across to Brennan at the switch and tried to

put it off. He prevented her. Then, from Matt, in a low, tense voice:

"Don't do that. Let her do what she wants."

As though a small dog had bitten him, whose teeth had been unexpectedly sharp, Brennan made a quick move toward Matt, and Molly switched off the strong side lights.

"If you weren't a cripple——" Brennan began threateningly.

"I'm not a cripple—in my mind." Though Matt's words were few and controlled, it was surprising what an effect of quiet force he put into them. It angered Brennan more than would the approach of some threatening brawny rival with clenched fists.

"It's time you went to bed," said Brennan, between his teeth. "I'm supposed to get you there. But just for that you can sit here all night playin' your damned fiddle."

He turned on his heel and went out.

It was Molly who wheeled Matt to his ground-floor room, laid out everything he needed, waited outside, and then came softly back with the glass of hot milk Miss Catesby always gave him. She put out his light, opened his windows, and lingered an instant with her hand on his hair.

"Oh, Molly! *Could* you——"

She stooped and laid an airy kiss upon his eager lips and fled away.

"Oh, God!" whispered Matt to himself, as the door closed softly, "if I only had a doggoned thing in the world!"

XXIV

The maid asks advice of the mistress. The mistress learns something as well, from the maid. Why not?

"MRS. KENT——"

"Yes, Molly."

Pretty Molly came in and closed the door. Mrs Kent didn't look too busy, she was merely reading a book.

"Could I talk to you a little bit, Mrs. Kent? I—I'm—I want to talk to somebody who knows, and Martha don't."

"I may not know, Molly. But—tell me. Sit down near me, here."

Molly sat on the edge of the comfortable chintz-covered bedroom chair and looked down at her organdie apron. Then up again, bravely.

"Mrs. Kent, do you think a girl's right to get married if she don't know how it's going to turn out?"

Judith laid down her book. This was evidently serious. And who was she, to advise? A pang shot through her at the thought of possibly losing Molly, who had been with her more than five

years, and had become more indispensable and attractive to her each year. She was conscious of feeling a strong affection for the girl—stronger than she had realized until this hint of leaving her service struck her ears. But she mustn't take that into consideration, of course, in offering advice.

"But you can't quite expect to know beforehand how it's going to turn out, Molly. The question is, I should say, how, at least, it will begin. Are you ready for it?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Kent. The trouble is—there's two of them. And I can't tell which."

"Then I should wait till I could, my dear."

"But—" Molly fingered her apron, her curly red head bent again—"they won't wait. They make my life miserable for me."

"Brennan and—the young man who comes out every Sunday?"

"Yes'm. And I sometimes think—it sounds silly, but I do sometimes think one of them will shoot the other, they're that jealous."

Judith's amused reaction to this was the impulse to say: "Let them do it." But she understood that poor Molly was very unhappy, so after a moment's silence she said gently, "'When in doubt don't take either train' is a very good

old-fashioned rule, though I'm not sure it always applies. Haven't you the least idea which you prefer of these two, if either?"

"They're both very nice to me—when they're not mad at each other. Both of them show me good times—generous with their money. I like their looks. But—" and here Molly's always peach-like face took on an enhanced bloom—"there's another——"

"Another! Oh, now we are getting at it, Molly."

"I'm afraid we aren't, at that, Mrs. Kent. There's not a word of marrying been between us. I know he thinks there couldn't be. But—the way his eyes look at me when I bring in the tea—or do anything at all for him. . . . And the little things he says. . . . And I'm that sorry for him I'd do anything I knew to make him happy. . . . I—had to tell you—I couldn't bear it alone—somehow . . ."

Here it was—here was the real thing, as Judith instantly recognized. She might have guessed it. Poor Matt Moody, with his wistful, engaging looks, his as yet comparative helplessness, his music, had charmed Molly's pitiful, warm heart away from the two young men of brawn and competence who were ready to fly at each other's

throats for love of her. Well, she, Judith, could understand. It was the spirit, even more than the flesh, which was drawing this young Irish girl, and the knowledge of that placed her on a higher plane than Judith had dreamed she could occupy. Molly's employer became more deeply sympathetic, though she maintained her quiet, unemotional tone and manner, because that was best for Molly, who was now on the verge of tears.

"Molly, dear, it's a difficult situation—just now. But Matt is getting better—Dr. Kennedy expects him to be entirely well again before very long, now. I don't suppose he has any property whatever, but with his violin he might find work in some small orchestra. If you really care for him——"

"Oh, I do—I can't help it. He's that sweet."

"He *is* sweet. And I think he is manly, too. Of course——" an instinct of caution warned her—"we don't know just what friends—a wife—a sweetheart—he may have. He's told us very little."

Molly's head came up like a flash.

"I wouldn't have you think, Mrs. Kent, I'd be letting myself go like this over a married man. I wouldn't care so much about the sweetheart—girls come and girls go, and the one a

a man wants he should have. But he hasn't got anybody like that."

"Did he tell you?"

"I went though all his poor things—he told me to, to put them in order for him. There wasn't a picture of anybody, even. He said he hadn't any folks in the world."

"‘Folks,’ to him, might mean family—father and mother, or brother. I must tell you this, Molly. One day he played for me a little song he had written, and he sang the words under his breath. He has quite a nice tenor voice. It was a song to a girl. Her name I can't recall, but I said to myself at the time, ‘That must be poor Matt's sweetheart—or somebody he'd like to make one.’"

Molly gazed at her, a tinge of doubt coming into her eyes. "Oh, I wonder if it could be. I don't think it could, and him—the way he is to me. But—Mrs. Kent—I'll have to find out. If I could have—just a bit of a chance. Matt's almost never alone—there's always Miss Catesby—or he's in the big room with you. But I've got to know."

"You shall. I'll make the chance."

"Oh, you're so good to me, Mrs. Kent! I knew you'd understand what—caring such a lot

—does to you. You can't help it. You could have everything you want coming to you from other boys—but if there's one you go to sleep dreaming about——” She broke off, frightened. What had she said to her mistress that might seem impertinent? For whether Judith Kent ever dreamed of that gallant gentleman, her husband, was one of the things Molly wanted to know.

But Judith answered evenly enough, “Yes, I think that's the way to tell, Molly. And if Brennan, for one, annoys you, tell me, and I'll have a word with him. I've only seen Harry Casey, but I would talk with him, too, if necessary. Anyhow, if you're fond of Matt, and Matt of you——”

“I don't dare say that, Mrs. Kent. I just—think it. I know I'm bold to say so.”

“I understand. Undoubtedly what you think is true. The signs aren't hard to read. So wipe your eyes, and I'll make your chance for you as soon as I can.”

“Oh, thank you. There's not many would take the interest in a girl that's only in their employ.”

“Nonsense, Molly.” The employer's smile at her pretty maid—this really beautiful, trained, efficient young servant, whose heart under her

becoming gray-taffeta uniform was worth any decent man's winning—was very bright. "You must know quite well how much I think of you, after more than five years of looking after my needs. Your happiness means very much to me. The point where I may differ from some of those I know is in imagining a young man who is now so down and out a sufficiently fit mate for you, who deserve the best. But I do think Matt is the best, Molly—if we can only make him strong and fit again. And we can."

"I wouldn't care," Molly murmured, "whether he ever got strong—except for his own sake. I could work for two. If I could just have—oh, it's something Billy Brennan nor Harry Casey haven't got, with all their strength, that Matt's got that's worth so much to me—that draws the heart out of me. I can't explain it."

"Don't try, my dear. I do understand."

"Yes, ma'am, you would, being—" Molly dared it—"Mrs. Rawley Kent." And ran away out of the room.

XXV

A clothes-press is explored, with surprising results. Who could have foreseen it? Anybody with any discernment, of course. Clothes-presses are forever yielding up the things that were put there

OH, WHAT had Molly said? Judith, startled, wondered if the girl could have meant to do what she had done; compared, whether consciously or not—probably not, because she was so intent on her own affairs—poor, broken Matt Moody with that prince of good looks and personal magnetism, Rawley Kent! Yet, after all, there was something in that comparison to think about. She herself had chosen the man who drew her so irresistibly, in spite of his seeming deficiencies in force of character, when she might have had others whose very names spelled rapidly developing worldly power. She had thought it a wise choice—those first years with him had seemed to prove it. And suddenly she acknowledged to herself that if she could have those years back—well—mightn't they be worth having? Was her

plan proving itself such a wise one, after all?

A thought occurred to her—a resolution. She ordered Brennan and the car, dressed rapidly—it was only eleven in the morning—arranged that Miss Catesby should have the entire afternoon to herself, with Molly to wait on Matt, and was off for New York. She was giving Molly her chance, but that was not her only motive for absence.

In town, after a hurried luncheon, Brennan drove her to the apartment which Rawley was holding, in spite of the cost, during this long absence from it—the place where he and she had been so happy in those first years. She had not seen it since she had left it; she knew it was bare of much of the furnishings. Its rugs were rolled up, all personal articles were gone from it; there was no life in it. But none the less she wanted to see it.

She went up to it—the tenth floor, with its magnificent view from the windows toward the south. She let herself in. She hadn't let Brennan come up with her, though he had plainly expected to. So she had to put up the shades and struggle with the heavy windows herself, to let air into the familiar yet strange rooms.

She went through them all, leaving Rawley's,

opening from her own, to the last, though this was really her objective. She stood looking about it. She could see the familiar, graceful figure nearly dressed for the evening, turning to greet her. . . .

"Come in, blessedness! Ready in a minute. Confound this waistcoat, I believe I'm getting fat—got to let out the back strap a bit. . . . My word, but you look marvellous! You ought to be put on canvas, this minute. You take my breath away! I've just enough left to get across the floor to you. . . . Suppose I can't touch you—except like this!"

He would lean toward her across a little distance, his arms in their gleaming white shirt sleeves encircling without grasping her, his laughing, attractive face thrust forward to kiss her. Then he would sweep her up. "Hang perfection! If I rumple you a trifle you'll be the more human, and I'll worship you just that much more."

She would have to go back to her mirror after that, to remove the traces of his ardour. Her heart would be beating to suffocation with the joy of being adored like that.

It had lasted so long, that ardour of his. If he had gradually lost it, it must have been be-

cause of herself, her unconscious occasional change of manner toward him.

"Rawley, aren't you ready *yet*? I've rushed home from that League meeting, written five letters, telephoned three committee heads, had my bath, dressed—and here you are, with nothing to do, only just out of your bath. And—why so gloomy?"

"Sorry, Judith dear. It's always the busy people, eh?—who keep their engagements to the dot? I, being an idler——"

"You acknowledge that?"

"Twice over. I cumber the earth with my idleness. All I've done this whole afternoon is to set down a *motif* for a cradle song that's been troubling my brain for days. I think I have it. But of course that's nothing to have accomplished."

"Just a trifle slender, I should say.—I promised Mrs. Bryant to be early—to meet some really important person who can't stay a moment after dinner so must be seen before. We should be off in five minutes. Brennan's had the car at the door for fifteen."

"I'll hurry."

"Please do."

Such tiny straws, to show which way the wind was blowing! . . .

But her thoughts now, as she gazed about the empty, cheerless room which had once been so full of Rawley's expensive, well-chosen furnishings and personal effects, were all of the earlier days. She went over to the high carved chest, to the massive desk, to the built-in wardrobe—looking through them all to see if she might find something of his. Nothing—he had cleared them out completely. She had hardly realized that. It seemed strange to her now that he should have done so. Wait—in a corner of a clothes-press hung just one garment of his which he must have discarded or overlooked. A striped crash bath gown in faded brown and orange, about which she had many times gently rallied him. How could the garment have lasted so long? . . .

“Rawley, darling—how you can like this thing! It might be just anybody's, it's so common place.”

“Who wants a bath gown to be anything but commonplace? It's comfortable. Besides, it's good stuff. It's the one thing left over from my bachelor days that I've an honest affection for. See here—is it commonplace *now*?”

She had been enfolded a thousand times by those brown and orange sleeves. Now remem-

bering, she suddenly hid her face in the familiar fabric. Was there a faint fragrance of mingled bath soap and cigarettes still clinging to it? If there wasn't she could easily imagine it. Imagine the clean flesh inside it, glowing from the cold shower which always followed the hot bath and the vigorous rub-down which completed the affair.

"Is it commonplace *now*, sweetness?"

She would answer, her cheek pressed against his breast, across which he hadn't bothered to draw the rough crash, "No, it's the most distinctive garment I ever came into such close contact with, because it holds—*you!*"

"That's better. Better to be held tight by crash than indifferently touched by velvet, eh?—if bath gowns were ever fashioned of velvet, which heaven forbid."

Such foolish little memories assailed her. Rawley shaving, finally wiping off the lather to grin at her. Rawley coming up behind her, as she sat at her dressing table, to look over her shoulder at both their faces, in the mirror, his long, slim fingers touching her neck, feeling the exquisite skin.

"What's the use of all those jars and bottles?"

You never look as though you'd touched 'em—I couldn't bear it if you did look that way."

"I soon should if I didn't use them, dear, and you know it. You want me to keep young as long as I can, don't you?"

"You'll never grow old."

"Of course I shall."

"Never. When we both begin to feel the first touch of growing old we'll go up in a plane, let go the controls, and crash together. When you die I want to die with you."

Extravagances, but they had made life wonderful during those first years. She thought of them now—and then, over against the memory of them she could hear Rawley's voice, just before he went away, cool, controlled, concise.

"I'll send you my address when I know it. Let me know if I can be of any use to you. Don't fear that I shall break this contract—to stay away. Good-bye, my dear."

Oh, if he would break it! If she could look over at the door this minute and see him standing in it!

Instead—he had refused to come back to her unless she actually needed him for some—presumably—business reason. He would never come back. She had lost him. . . .

Brennan waited for her below, wondering. He didn't know that she couldn't come down until she had finished crying and had made her eyes presentable again. And that takes time and care.

XXVI

It is not always easy to get what one wants, for the asking. It depends almost entirely upon what has been asked for before

SUDDENLY Judith knew she must see her husband. She wanted to see him so that she couldn't bear it. She couldn't understand that, because heretofore she had seemed to be getting on very well without him. But Jerrold's story had changed all that. She supposed Jerry was right: that she had been putting Rawley away from her because his life of ease and non-action had come to contrast so strongly with her own ever-increasing activity. But if there had been a devastating reason, such as Jerrold described—that altered everything.

She was an impulsive person, used to making quick decisions which usually turned out to be good ones because there was intelligence behind them. September was well along; if she was to remain at Wild Gull Cove until through October, as Dr. Kennedy advised, there was time for Rawley to join her here where they could talk

things over. He needn't stay unless he wanted to, but a talk they ought to have. Besides—Natalie Vickers . . .

She wrote to him. It was the first letter she had attempted since his news about Natalie. She hadn't been able to decide how to answer that, or whether to answer it at all. Now—she must.

DEAR RAWLEY:

I am wondering if you would care to come back—all the way back across the continent—in order to have a talk with me here by my fire. You could go back to Montana again fast enough, but I feel somehow that we should have the talk. I can't write what is in my mind, and I'm sure neither of us could get anywhere by means of letters. You are so used to taking a train for anywhere if the mood seizes you, I don't believe you will mind coming if I assure you I really wish it. I do.

JUDITH.

She expected but one answer to this—he would wire that he was coming—on the way. What else could he do, even if he wanted to? But when the time had elapsed which would more than cover

the journey of her letter, no wire came. It was not until eight days had gone by that she received his reply. Molly brought it to her, watching her covertly to see whether she welcomed its coming. Molly knew exactly how long it was since one of those thick gray envelopes which Mr. Kent always used, the address written in his unmistakable slightly jerky hand, had come in with the mail. In spite of the heavy paper, it was easy for Molly to see that this envelope held but one sheet. The last one she remembered, arriving weeks ago, had evidently contained several sheets; it had carried two postage stamps. No need of more than one for this letter.

"Thank you, Molly." The pleasant smile, the light tone, as usual. Mrs. Kent didn't look as though she meant to tear the letter open—not while Molly was in the room. The girl lingered a full minute to see, picking up a few dropped petals from a bowl of flowers upon the piano. No, the mistress seemed in no hurry, though there had been no other letter in the mail, merely a magazine. But when Molly had left the room she saw Mrs. Kent going immediately down to the beach, a book in her hand, and no letter in sight. She had not had time to read it.

"You want to get off by yourself," thought

Molly. "That's the way people do when they care what's going to be in a letter. Oh, how can you let him go?"

Out of sight, around the cliff on the beach far below the house, Judith opened her letter from Rawley. It was amazing how fast her heart was beating, how shaky she felt. What had he to say to her? Ever since she had sent off her request to him to come back for that talk by the fire she had been growing increasingly anxious to see him. Strange how Jerrold's story seemed to alter everything. A queer, hollow longing to pillow Rawley's head on her shoulder and tell him that if she had only known—had only guessed—how much he needed her. . . . It was almost like the longing one has, after someone dear to one has died, to say loving things, bestow endearments, that one feels have been withheld too often. To have the chance once more—only once more. . . . The one sheet trembled in her fingers as she began to read. And as she read she felt as though she had received a blow in the face.

DEAR JUDITH:

I have thought over your request that I come back for a talk—thought it over very carefully

—and have decided that although perhaps I should take the request for a command, it is wiser for me to tell you that I don't think it best to come. I believe it is the first time that I have ever refused an expressed wish of yours, but for reasons that I can't explain I am writing as I do.

The year of enforced separation ends in February, but I expect to stay on here. This country, this outdoor life, my associates—they are all doing something for me which I needed done. I can't describe to you the change which is taking place in me—but it is a change which I welcome. To travel East and see you now is something I can't face—unless you tell me it is absolutely necessary to your peace of mind or health of body. You don't need me—that is easy to see. When you failed to answer the letter in which I poured out everything to you—and which I know you read—I realized that the wall between us had grown thick and high. I can imagine the reason. Anything that you wanted to say to me can be said by letter; I will agree to give you whatever you wish.

If you care to know it—and I suppose women always do care for that much triumph—I can assure you that the first years of our life together

can never be forgotten. But I know now that I wasn't fitted for you, and I know that we could never get back what has gone. I did you a wrong, I think now, to have married you. Anyhow, now that I am here and am learning every day things I never knew before—greatest of all, perhaps, the strength there can be in other men and what it can do for one to be associated with it—I want to stay. I may be a different Rawley Kent when I come out of these mountains—I hope so. I sorely needed what I am finding here.

It was some sort of sense of duty, I know, which dictated your brief letter. Let that be at rest, my dear. I shall not lose the dream of you, but—I am coming awake now, and I shall not need to live on dreams. Instead I shall find something else, I hope—more real.

RAWLEY.

Oh, what was this! And who was this! Rawley, writing such a letter? What had happened to him? The other letter had been the old Rawley, this was a different man. What did he mean—what had changed him? Natalie Vickers? It didn't sound like that. "Other men." Rawley had always had plenty of men friends, good enough fellows—rich, gay, ready for everything that

promised a good time, like himself. His own class. He couldn't be having any of his own class out there in Montana, association with whom would make him speak like that of them. It couldn't be this Dave, could it, of whom he had written in an early letter? Dave could be only a cattleman, guide, or at best a Western ranch owner. Probably an interesting chap in his rough way; but not conceivably one with whom Rawley, with his fastidious tastes, could want to spend a long, shut-in winter.

He wasn't coming to see her—incredibly he wasn't coming! How had she worded her invitation? She could recall it, almost exactly, she had pondered over it so long. She had meant to convey her wish to see him and talk things over with him without giving him any reason whatever to imagine that she really cared, for his own sake. Very likely he had read into it a suggestion of divorce. He thought she wanted to marry Dr. Kennedy, and he was willing to let her do it. . . .

All at once this tremendous wave of longing for her husband had swept over her. This letter, while entirely courteous, had iron in it. Whatever qualities Rawley, as she knew him, had possessed, none of them had indicated iron—

force—strong will. It was what, she supposed, she had ultimately missed in him, when the days of being carried away and blinded by the nearness of his charming personality, the magic of the music he made for her, the unconscious grace of everything he said and did, not even to mention the beauty of his unusual face, had somewhat gone by. By contrast, Dr. Kennedy had seemed to her to be the embodiment of strength, power, usefulness. The more she had seen of him the more Rawley's image had become lustreless by comparison with the plain but forcefully attractive face of the surgeon.

But now it stood out again, that face of Rawley's. When she went back to the house it was to study the photograph once more. The man who had made it had been one of those who analyze their subject as a portrait painter would, pose him with an artful carelessness, catch him at a moment free of self-consciousness, and have, as a result, the visible record of a personality entire, not a mere surface outline. In this picture Rawley was a figure to admire and love, charming to any eye whether one knew him personally or not, graceful, genial, aristocratic in every line. Once Judith had thought it the most beautiful photograph she had ever seen. After

she had come to know Lyle Kennedy's more austere looks she had thought she saw a weakness in Rawley's pictured face. Now, as she gazed at it, in the light of the letter she had just read, the weakness seemed to have vanished. Had he really been weak? Hadn't she seen his eyes flash fire, his jaw set, his controlled voice speak in the language of the master? Essentially sweet and lovable, hadn't there always been an effect of unmistakable virility about him? When he had left her, hadn't he gone as a man goes, swiftly, sturdily, without a look behind? Oh, she didn't know—she didn't know—what to think about him now. All she did know was that he had refused to come back to her—unless she insisted upon some pretense of urgent need, some assertion that she must have him for one pregnant interview. She couldn't insist—she was too proud. And he—quite evidently he had grown proud, too. And—something else. He was changing, not only toward her, but in some mysterious way of which he could not tell her.

She was unhappier than she had ever been before in her life.

XXVII

Out where things are different and not everything has to be decided while the telephone bell is ringing, a messenger is waiting, and other people are grouped about, their ears pricked forward

IN THE immense living room of such a log ranch house as rich Easterners build in Montana, three men were gathered. The room was comfortable and attractive to the point of luxury—as luxury may be expressed in such houses. Comfortable chairs, a deep couch before the fire in an enormous stone fireplace, gigantic logs blazing hotly, a table backing the couch with a powerfully lighted reading lamp upon it, books and magazines covering it; hunting trophies upon the walls, huge animal skins and other rugs upon the floor. There was nothing lacking. And outside, in the darkness, stretched the reason for it all—one of the widest, most breath-taking panoramas to be found in Montana, for the house stood high above the valley, in the mountains, and its great porches reached from end to end of the long cabin.

This was a late September night and a chill one. Therefore the fire and the three men gathered before it. One, the host, was Rawley Kent. Although in the daytime he lived in hunting clothes, high leather boots, and other trappings essential to the outdoor life, in the evenings at the ranch house he liked to don what he called civilian clothes, well-fitting tweeds or homespun such as he had been accustomed to wear in the morning in the East. He would never, he imagined, quite get away from his lifelong training in fastidiousness; for the closing meal of the day, wherever he was, he liked to be freshly bathed, shaved, and dressed. No doubt it was an effeminacy, he told himself, which with Dave Carpenter for a companion he ought to abrogate. Dave lived in his boots, his mackinaws, his flannel shirts, and loose, bright-hued ties. Rawley liked him that way; he wouldn't for anything have had Dave put on his one "best" suit, reserved for weddings and other momentous occasions; for with that cheap suit Dave was sure to put on also a stiff and awkward, even subdued manner. No, Dave was at his best in the long evenings only in his Western rig, his hair combed to a shining smoothness, his deeply tanned face as cleanly shaven as Rawley's

own, his neckerchief tied with exceeding care. To Rawley, Dave was quite perfect exactly as he was.

The third man present occupied the chief seat, facing the fireplace, while the others lounged on either side of him, watching him, talking with him, but mostly listening to him. For he was worth both watching and listening to. Dave had been shy of him at first, because the Westerner had discovered "Bishop" to be the awful prefix to his name, and Dave, though he had seen few of them, had a strong prejudice against bishops. But this one, it turned out, didn't wish to be addressed by his title; he had forbidden it immediately upon his arrival.

"I'm two decades older than you, Rawley," he had said, "but I've known you all your life. Out here in the West let's drop the formalities of the East. Call me what you did before I took my latest title—I much preferred that to my present one. I'd like Dave to call me that, too, if he wants to."

So "Father" he had become to them both, and a father he seemed to the younger men. His hair was a rich iron-gray, but in the early fifties his face was fresh in colouring, his eyes as bright and keen as those of a young man in spite of

certain not deeply marked lines which gave character and individuality to his fine features. Ecclesiastical he was not, though Rawley possessed vivid memories of him as he had looked in his vestments, moving with fine dignity at the end of a long procession of standard bearers, choir singers, and younger clergymen, down the aisle of a great Eastern church. He wore no vestments here, not even the everyday dress of the cleric. Instead, in rough gray tweeds, he looked the picture of a man of power in almost any other field than that of his own. Yet, strangely, to Rawley, he was not as other men; he belonged in the centre of the picture as surely as though in sanctimonious arrogance he had claimed it for himself—far more surely, of course.

Father Chipman had been Rawley's guest for a month. He had come to the visitor's ranch five miles away, in the course of a journey which was meant for a vacation. He had been greeted with enthusiasm by Natalie Vickers, had been taken by her to call upon Rawley—and thus the invitation to stay with Rawley had come about. Afterward Mrs. Vickers realized that she had defeated her own ends by bringing her bishop to see her friend—so she called him—Rawley Kent. Rawley had simply taken the high priest away

from this one of his most ardent parishioners. And with Bishop Chipman there, there was now small chance of Natalie's seeing Rawley alone. The two men were together from morning till night. The bishop's visit had been prolonged. To Rawley he had become a saver of life; he held on to him. And as the bishop was sorely in need of a rest after a long period of vigorous campaigning in behalf of certain missions supported by his church, he had been given leave of a quarter of a year. Only a small portion of this had been used when he came to Rawley's ranch. But here he had been content to remain. The companionship between the older and the younger man had become a thing to be cherished by both sides. As for Dave, he was the very sauce to the meat; both the others heartily liked, on those long fall evenings, to have him present; though when he left for his bed they were sure to enjoy a still later hour together.

"What I can't see, Father," Dave offered, at about nine in this evening, looking over at the bishop after a considerable period of silence which had fallen upon the three—much pleasant talk having preceded it—"is how an honest-to-goodness man like you comes to want to put a little white collar round your neck and button

it behind.—Maybe I'm bein' rude," he added, "but I been wantin' to ask you that question ever since you been here. And I made up my mind just now I'd ask it. Because I want to know the answer, if you don't object to givin' it, even if it is a pretty personal subject. But you don't have to answer if you don't want to. . . . I guess I *am* bein' rude," he added, and looked worried.

The bishop looked over at him and smiled. It was one of his comprehending smiles. He could see into Dave's mind perfectly, by means of this outright question. He was glad the young rancher had ventured to ask it. It showed that he himself was getting pretty close to Dave, which was what he very much wanted to do.

"I don't mind answering in the least," he replied. He knew that Rawley Kent also was listening for the reply to this interestingly impertinent, searching question. "The answer is easy. I *don't* want to put a little white collar around my neck and button it behind. I'm not doing it just now, you notice. And the reason for that is that it's a great relief to get away from it, and wear a collar that buttons in front. With a tie like this," he added, glancing down affectionately at the lightly striped gray and blue and undeniably expensive tie he wore.

Dave didn't know it was expensive, Rawley did. "You have no idea,"—he turned his fine head toward Rawley—"how I'm rioting in this collar and tie."

"I can imagine it," Rawley returned with an answering grin. "But I think you'll have to satisfy Dave as to why you do wear the other. The only bishops he's seen, I can swear, have kept on the collar even when riding horseback."

"They sure have." Dave's tone was grim. "Only one of 'em rode horseback, though. The others passed it up. They were the wise guys, believe *me*. The boys were layin' for 'em."

"Dave," said the bishop, "are you old enough to have been in the Great War?"

"You bet. Swore I was twenty-one—at seventeen. A little smudge o' charcoal where my beard wasn't put it over. And I was six-foot-two when I was that old, and I packed a gun that wasn't any Christmas toy when I went to enlist. Yes, I got by."

"Did you refuse to put on the uniform?"

"No—I get you. But—just the same—why did they start those back-to-the-front collars, anyway?"

"Because it was an age when ceremonial dress counted heavily. It still counts. In other words,

Dave, it's the custom of my church, and I can't refuse it. But I agree with you that it's bad for the circulation in the neck. If you would like to know, I have many a time torn the collar off, after a service, and thrown it across the room. That didn't mean any disloyalty to my profession, either. It only meant that my neck ached."

Dave laughed. He liked the frankness of this answer to his inquisitive question. He admitted to himself that he was answered. The bishop was always frank, he knew.

"I'm glad it don't have to ache, out here," he said, and ran his hand under his own neckerchief and around his bronzed throat, exulting in the entire freedom the three-cornered square of silk gave him—much more than even the bishop's unclerical collar he seemed to be enjoying so much gave *him*, at the best. "Well"—he got up and stretched his mighty frame—"now that I know about *that*, I s'pose I better be takin' myself off to bed."

He went promptly upon this declaration. He was shrewd enough to know that though his companions liked his company, they also probably valued more highly the hour that was theirs after he was gone. All day the three were out in the forest trails, tramping or hunting or riding.

Evening was the time for good talk. Dave had never known such talk as he had heard since this visitor had come. He couldn't follow all of it; the other two were still strangers from a strange land, as far as his own knowledge of certain things they talked about went—books, and pictures, and music, and the rest.

They were loco about music, he considered. As for books, they were positively insane. And pictures—well, what could beat those they saw from their own porches, high up in the foothills? he'd like to know. But when they began to talk about travel and men—particularly when they talked about men—that was when he listened most attentively.

It seemed that the bishop must have known every kind of man there was—including Dave's own kind. And had learned something from them all—that was what he said. Dave believed him. He had certainly stored all that knowledge away—you could see that. And thought not a bit the more of himself for knowing so much. That was the best thing about him, from Dave's point of view. No boasting, no bragging, no making you feel like an ignoramus. Instead, he made you feel that you could tell him a lot of things—and you did—you couldn't seem to

help it. Things you'd never told any man—nor ever meant to. Dave always went away to bed pondering—and wishing that Bishop James Chipman and Mr. Rawley Kent would never go away from Montana.

“Why, they just—they just—” he said to himself, as he strode away to the room Rawley had made him take, though he had at first preferred the bunkhouse—he didn't now—“they just—I don't know *what* they do to you, but they sure do it!” Which was a pretty big tribute, from Dave Carpenter, to two men who came from a world so far away from his own that they couldn't have been expected to take him into their society at all. Yet they had, away in, to their everlasting credit with this sturdy son of the West.

XXVIII

A Confessional—but you'd hardly call it that

SOMETIME after Dave had gone, Rawley spoke, out of a silence. He had been smoking cigarette after cigarette, throwing each into the fire when less than half consumed, after the extravagant habit of years. The bishop, pulling gently on a seasoned English briarwood, had been lying back in his chair, as one completely at rest, his deep-set eyes under heavy black eyebrows contrasting strikingly with his iron-gray hair, as he watched the leaping flames with their blue edges. Pitch pine makes a fire to watch.

“Father,” he said, “I’ve something to tell you—something I’m half afraid to tell you lest everything should be different to-morrow. But of course there’s no sense in being superstitious. . . . I spent an hour to-day trying to commit to memory a rather long piece of verse I liked—a quite stiff one, too. . . . It’s a thing I haven’t been able to do since 1918. It took straight concentration, and my mind never once slipped up.

I haven't dared try it before, but somehow to-day I had a hunch I could. And did."

The bishop took it quietly—the best way, though he knew it was as momentous a piece of news as though Rawley had been appointed an ambassador to some important country. Rather more momentous, in fact, since being able to concentrate one's mind on a difficult task of memorizing after ten years of impotence might easily mean more than having an honour bestowed.

"Of course you did," he said, without even turning his head. "The time has come for you to be able to do it, that's all."

"You don't think," questioned Rawley, whose face had turned a little pale, as a well-tanned skin may under emotion, "I mightn't be able to do it again to-morrow?"

"I don't know that I should do it again to-morrow. Content yourself with repeating what you have learned to-day. But by day after to-morrow give yourself another piece of raw food to chew on. You can digest it."

Rawley got up rather suddenly and began nervously to pace the long room. After a minute the bishop got up, too, and came and threw his arm about the other's shoulder and drew him

toward one of the big doors which opened upon the long piazza. It was a black night out, but the air was like chilled wine. The two stood looking off into the blackness together.

"This is a mighty good place," said Chipman, "to think things out in, eh? I had quite a list of bothersome problems on my mind when I came here. One by one the solution of them has come to me. Simple solutions, too—or so they seem to me now, though they appeared pretty complicated before. Oddly enough, that boy Dave, to-night, with his curiosity about clerical collars, gave me what I think may be the answer to one of my biggest puzzles."

"Anything you'd care to tell me about?" Rawley inquired, knowing his friend wouldn't have mentioned it at all if he hadn't been willing to discuss the subject.

"I want to. . . . It's a queer thing, but getting out of clerical dress, here in Montana, has given not only my body a sense of freedom, but it seems to have liberated my mind. I suspect it's something akin to what putting on golf clothes does to a man in big business—makes a boy of him again for a few hours. And that's good for any man. When I go back to my work, even though I can't often escape wearing 'the cloth,' I can,

now and then, break down the barriers which a certain type of man in some of the places I visit feels reared between us when he looks at my clerical collar. I can, in exceptional cases, wear the same sort of clothes he does when I go to see him. Do you imagine I should have got anywhere with Dave if I had looked like a bishop while I have been here?"

"Not an inch," declared Rawley. "I myself am less afraid of you, you know, looking as you do out here. That's why I've—talked so much about myself. . . . Father—I had a letter to-day from Judith—and sent her one. It was to get away from what was in both her letter and mine that I came to try to commit that poem to memory. I'd like to tell you about it, if I may."

"Tell away, lad. I want to hear."

So Rawley told him what Judith had written, and what he himself had said in reply. At the outset of the bishop's visit Rawley had given his friend a simple explanation of the situation, and the bishop had said quietly enough that it was probably a very good thing that the two, having arrived at a crisis, had agreed to test their love for each other by the year's separation. He had married them himself—he remembered

clearly the gravely radiant faces they had lifted to him as he read to them the marriage ritual. He had thought then that their chances for happiness were decidedly better than those of most of the people upon whom he had invoked the Divine blessing. If now they were in doubt, he said to himself, it was Judith who had gone on while Rawley had stood still. He knew of Rawley's long-lasting handicap since wartime—he and Jerrold Cunningham and Dr. Alexander Symonds—only they three understood. His own coming up here in the mountains of Montana had seemed the merest chance. But it had come to seem more than a chance. The bishop knew Natalie Vickers; being a man of extraordinary discernment he recognized what dangerous fires might be smouldering, kindled by her constant visits. For she couldn't be kept entirely away, even with Bishop James Chipman there, to whose parish she belonged simply because so many people of importance did. And the bishop was quite human enough to be aware of her peculiar allurements. Nevertheless, he approved of Rawley's refusal to go to his wife.

"There are times," he said upon consideration, "when a man must refuse to do what a woman

asks if he would keep her respect. The question is, my dear boy, whether you care to keep anything more. In either case, the course you have decided upon seems to me the wise one. According to my observation no woman worth having or keeping wants a man to crawl at her feet."

Rawley straightened himself, stiffening, his head thrown back.

"No danger of it now," he said. "I feel somehow as though the weakness had gone out of me. I want to exercise my mind as I've learned out here to exercise my muscles. What comes afterward doesn't so much matter as that I make myself fit to face it, whatever it is. I see that now."

The next evening, after a long day on the trails, when Rawley had had his bath, instead of putting on those well-fitting clothes of his he donned a fresh flannel shirt, with a loose Windsor tie, clean whipcords, and his best and easiest pair of riding boots. He came to supper in this outfit. When Dave saw him he put his hands on his hips and stood surveying him.

"*Now* you're shoutin'," he commended.

"You never looked better in your life, Rawley," added the bishop.

"I'm still only an imitation Westerner," grinned Rawley Kent, "but I like the feel of even the imitation."

"You're not so much of an imitation, at that," conceded Dave. "East or West, I'll say it's the man inside the stuff he wears that sticks out and shows what he is. I thought, first off, Mr. Kent was one of them kind you couldn't get to walk off the trail, fearin' he'd stub his toe. After a while—I saw different. And if he'll just stay out of the kind of pants that has to have a crease down the front, I'll bet you it'll be the makin' of him."

The laughter that went up from his two friends made his bronzed face redden. "I s'pose I've said somethin' awful again," he apologized.

"You've said something mighty wise," Rawley assured him.

"What about me, Dave?" questioned the bishop. "Do I need to avoid creases down the front as well as buttons in the back?"

Dave scanned him. "I wouldn't want to say about you, Father," he owned. "You're—different. But Mr. Kent, here—I like to see the signs of him not carin' how the hell he looks so he packs a gun he can handle quick an' sure. He can do that. I'd just like him to have it on him

all the time. He *can't* do that in them creased clothes."

Both Rawley and the bishop saw that Dave spoke in an allegory. Natalie Vickers had no charms for him. His clear eyes saw through her.

XXIX

*All we can't understand is why she didn't make use of
the Air Ways*

THERE was nothing else for it, Mrs. Rawley Kent must go out to Montana. She couldn't bear it longer not to see her husband and hear from his own lips what had happened to him. She wouldn't wire him she was coming, she would simply appear.

She made hasty arrangements. Matt Moody was well enough to leave; she had merely kept him on, trying to find a place for him in some orchestra. It wasn't an easy thing to do, and he had used the interim in which to practise for hours each day, eager now—except for leaving Molly—to be gone. Sarah Catesby found a room for him not far from the hospital, with an old woman whom she had long known. Dr. Kennedy promised to do his best for Matt. Everybody—except Harry Casey and Bill Brennan—was fond of Matt. Judith, abstracted though she now was, herself took leave of him with reluctance.

The servants were to remain at Wild Gull Cove until they heard from her. She might wire them to open the apartment in town; she couldn't tell just yet, she said. Meanwhile, they were to have a vacation in her absence, using the car to run into town now and then, only never all three at once getting out of touch with the Cove house lest a message come suddenly.

It sounded very mysterious to the Listening Post. Staying on there through October, with all the summer residents gone, till they should hear from her! They didn't like that, though they received the order with nods of acquiescence, as became them. She didn't tell them where she was going. They only hoped her coming absence had to do with Mr. Kent. Martha and Molly were sure it had. Not so Brennan, the cynical.

"I'll bet she's goin' off with Dr. Kennedy," he growled. "They had a tale a mile long yesterday, and there was no gettin' near enough to tell what they said."

"She's *not!*" Molly fiercely contested. "You shan't say it."

"All right. I'll think it, then."

"You shan't think it!"

"Oh, indeed. I'll think what I please. I know

a lot more about the world and its ways than you do." Brennan knew he had lost her; he didn't care what he said.

"All I hope," Martha put in, "is we don't have to stay out here long. With all the goings on at both ends of the house there's no peace for anybody."

The Listening Post was not in a happy mood when Mrs. Kent said good-bye to it. She was going where it couldn't listen!

It was the middle of October, it was likely to be cold up among the mountains. There was no knowing how long she would stay, if she stayed at all, but she must go equipped. She wouldn't have been herself if she hadn't taken pains with her outfit, thinking out every attractive and suitable detail. Simple, dark richness—it need not be a contradiction in terms—that was what Rawley liked to see her in, and he was especially fond of blues and grays for her. Many a time he had sat by, hat and stick in hand, cool and critical, in some Paris house of fashion, while models came and went. Finally, "There," he would say, "that's for you. Put it on, please. . . . I knew it." It might not be what she would have chosen, but when she viewed herself in

the entire ensemble he had selected she had had to admit that he was right; in just those things she was a satisfying vision of quiet, youthful elegance. She would order them copied for her, and go away with Rawley, marvelling at his taste and discernment.

"A regular man milliner, aren't you?" she would tease him, as they went out.

"Not a bit. I couldn't tell about other women—they might wear velvet in the morning and tweed in the evening for all I'd notice."

"Nonsense! Of course you'd notice."

"But I couldn't tell them what to wear instead. With you—it's like finding the right frame for a favourite picture. Its beauties mustn't be subordinated, they must be enhanced. One doesn't care about someone else's picture."

"Sure you don't judge by the beautiful models? The one of them who wore the clothes you chose for me was the loveliest creature I've ever seen."

"I didn't even see her," Rawley would protest.

She would smile unbelievably. None the less was his interest in her dressing dear to her, in those days. And it was dear to her again now, as she set forth to meet him, two thousand miles away.

"Whatever's gone wrong," Molly said to Martha, "I should think everything would be put right again the minute the master sees her. I never saw her look more wonderful, yet you couldn't call her all dolled up. That dress—that coat—those furs—that hat—her gloves—her handbag——"

"Daffy over her, as usual—and I'm not blamin' you," was Martha's comment. "Yet there's a look in her eyes—you can't tell—she looks as if she's seen somethin' that terrifies her."

Martha was quite right—it was precisely what Judith had seen. Terror over what she might find at the end of her journey—a Rawley who didn't want her any more. The fear had grown day by day till now it obsessed her.

Judith's train for the West was to leave at half-past two in the afternoon. An hour before that scheduled time Mrs. Rex Sylvester and Mrs. Hamilton DeForest were lunching together at a famous restaurant, frequented by people of social prominence, as well as by many others who came principally to observe them.

The two friends, who had also been friends of Judith's, but who had heard more and seen less of her than usual since their disappointing

visit to her at Wild Gull Cove, were sitting idly over their coffee, more or less bored with themselves. Suddenly Frances DeForest sat up straight; her eyes widened, then narrowed, fixing themselves upon a table not far away, partially shielded by a great white pillar. She spoke hastily, under her breath, now glancing in another direction, and with a deft movement pulling her small hat closer over her eyes.

"Alma! Don't look till I give you a sign, and then be very careful. Dr. Kennedy and Judith Kent are behind you at a table just beyond the second pillar to the left. And there's another woman with them. I never saw her before. I'd give anything to know who she is! No, don't look yet—Judith's facing our way."

"What does she look like—the other one?" murmured Mrs. Sylvester, her face also now lighted with interest. It had been a dull luncheon, not a thing that was new to discuss after the first ten minutes. But if Judith Kent and Dr. Kennedy and an unknown third person were near by, and if Frances looked as excited as that at sight of them, there must be something worth having come for, after all.

"Very demure, very chic, and totally unknown. All in black, with the best-looking hat

I've seen this season. Black eyes, quite pale face, the general effect really distinguished. Dear Judith looks almost blowsy beside her, with all that seaside tan."

"Judith blowsy! The other woman *must* be unusual. Can't I look yet?"

"I'm afraid not. Dr. Kennedy almost saw me then. No harm in that, only I'd rather observe than be caught at it."

"How old is she?"

"The stranger? She might be anywhere from twenty-eight to thirty-five. Obviously older than Judith. They're a very quiet party. Judith looks abstracted. Perhaps this is a rival. The affair is over, and she's trying to be game to the end."

"Frances, you don't *know* that it's been an affair," Alma Sylvester gently chided her friend. "Daren't I look yet?"

"Just a minute—here comes the waiter—they're choosing something to end with. . . . There—now! Quick!"

Mrs. Rex Sylvester, with the perfect technique of those who would seem to be entirely casual and yet discover all they want to know, reached behind her for the heavily furred coat which the waiter had draped upon her chair back as she sat down. Turning her head at the same

time she searched in an inner pocket of the garment—presumably for a purse or vanity case. Her innocent blue eyes at this instant glanced from under her hat brim, made sure of the pillar and the little group beyond, and, ready at any moment to shift elsewhere, rested on the three people in whom she was so deeply interested. A slight discussion with the waiter temporarily kept all of the three from looking her way, and she gained an extremely satisfactory impression of the stranger before discretion bade her turn her back again.

“Who *do* you suppose she is?” she whispered. “Perfectly stunning, in that sleek way. And it seems as though I’d seen her before. Can’t for the life of me think where.”

“I know—I feel that way, too. Yet if she were anybody at all we’d recognize her. Judith looks very swanky herself, as usual, but this other person is quite remarkable, in that small, dark way. Might be a visiting countess or something.”

“Nonsense, she’s probably one of Judith’s protégées, and Judith’s dressed her.”

“Not with all that poise. . . .”

They couldn’t make her out, but not because they didn’t linger, long after they had feed their waiter, to be able to see the three depart.

They followed, feeling slightly guilty, to the lobby and the entrance door in time to see the little group enter Dr. Kennedy's impressive professional car and be driven rapidly away. Then they looked at each other.

"I'd give anything," murmured Frances DeForest, "to follow them and find out what happens next. But Rogers is too far up the block to get here in time—though he's coming. No, they're out of sight."

"My dear, let's not be *too* curious!"

"No—not with the chance already gone from us," agreed Mrs. DeForest, with a cynical little grin on her pretty face. "I wish doctors' chauffeurs weren't so terribly hair-trigger about getting off."

Mrs. DeForest's car drew up at the curb, the hotel's liveried attendant put them in with his customary flourish, received his tip with the air of an archbishop accepting a contribution to his poor-fund, and the two young women settled back against the cushions. Both were pondering on the recent near-encounter. There was something about it which especially piqued their curiosity.

"I certainly have seen that face."

"So have I. But where?"

Silence, and deep stirring of memories. All at once Frances broke out: "Thorne! Judith's pet dressmaker. I've been there with her. The woman made me something once—quite successful."

"How absurd! No dressmaker could look as that woman looked!"

"That's absurd, too. Who could, better? They go to Paris, learn all the ropes, copy their customers' manners, and all. And Judith told me once this girl—woman—whatever she is—was educated. I think she had her out at Wild Gull Cove this summer—made a lot of fuss over her. Oh, yes—the Kents' chauffeur told ours."

"This simply can't be the same person. You're crazy."

"Yes, she is. And Judith had her along to-day to make a third in public, of course. Judith's getting wily—she's heard the gossip. . . . Oh, well—there's nothing much to be made out of *that*. Where shall I put you down, darling?"

"Drop me at the Corner Club, please; I want to see Marion Morton. She's sure to be there."

These two were charming young women, ex officio members of the Listening Post. But hardly as friendly ones, or as much to be trusted, as those at Wild Gull Cove.

XXX

*Three long days and nights on a transcontinental train.
And not what she expected at the end. It mostly hap-
pens that way*

THE journey seemed a long one—three days and three nights. Judith mostly spent them in her little drawing room, with occasional visits to the library car and the observation platform, where she sat muffled in her furs, hardly more than her eyes showing to her fellow passengers, oblivious of them. Almost all her meals were privately served; she had never wanted less to talk to any human being, or to be observed. At stops of any length she slipped into her coat and paced the platform, alone. Only with the conductors and porters of the trains did she hold any converse whatever. There was nothing they were not ready to do for her.

The hours at last were gone. Toward the end of the third afternoon she left her long through train at a junction and travelled for sixty miles or so on a rattling, swaying local. This smoked its slow way up the grades to the little

station well up in the mountain pass which bore the name of the post office through which Rawley's and her scanty correspondence had gone. With her two pieces of hand luggage beside her, she looked about her.

A roughly dressed young man in high boots approached her.

"Want to go to Shepherd's, ma'am? They ain't sendin' down the big busses now—most everybody's gone and nobody expected. I'm from there—came down for the mail."

"I want to go to what I believe is called the Langhorne Ranch. It's about twenty miles away, isn't it?"

"About that. Mr. Rawley Kent's bought it now, but I guess it'll be called Langhorne's for quite a time, now we've got used to it. I can take you there, ma'am, in no time—before it gets really dark. Road's fine to Shepherd's, after that not so good, but that's only the last five miles."

So Rawley had bought the ranch!

The young man put her into the back seat of the open touring car, handed in her bags, with an appreciative eye for their quality—the Westerner knows good leather when he sees it—and set off. Judith wrapped her coat close about her

and prepared herself for the journey. Not until they were off did it occur to her that she might have gone into the station and inquired whether this was a reliable person. There had been a few loungers on the station platform; there was a general store opposite it, and three or four other small and shabby buildings. There seemed to be nobody about above the social status of her self-appointed driver. But he had a pleasant enough face, though his beard was two days old, and his clothes showed as much wear as his car.

"See ye to-morrow, Shorty," called one of the loungers as the car moved off. "We'll look for all the news."

"You bet," replied Shorty—who was husky if not tall—and the car rattled away.

It sounded sinister and Western and allusive to herself, Judith thought, but there was nothing to do about it. It was quite evident to her that she had stirred the curiosity of the inhabitants of the tiny hamlet by arriving without notice to Mr. Rawley Kent, who would certainly have come to meet her, or sent somebody, if he had known. What was she doing, anyway, going to his ranch? It was general knowledge that he had a wife in the East, and speculation on the platform after she had been conveyed away

agreed that this probably was the young lady herself. She *looked* like the wife of a man like Kent—she had the same air that he had had when he had first come to Montana—and had never lost, no matter how he had become familiar with and had accepted to a certain degree its own customs. He hadn't an enemy among these men; he had one or two hearty friends. They would all have given their eyes to be driving with her over the road to the Langhorne ranch—and to see her arrival there.

Shorty took her there safely. He spoke hardly a word throughout the whole distance, and she asked no questions. She was too much preoccupied with her own thoughts, though until darkness fell she was aware of the wonder and beauty of the country through which they were proceeding. When they passed the large ranch of many buildings which was Shepherd's, Shorty told her; it was the one piece of information he gave her. She stared out at it and thought of Natalie Vickers. The largest house was lighted only at one end—she wondered if Natalie could be still there. Anyway, after they had left the place behind and she knew that there were only five more miles to go, her heart began to come into her throat, where it had been threatening

to take possession ever since she had wakened that morning, with the train running across the border into Montana.

"There she is, ma'am," Shorty suddenly vouchsafed, pointing through a dark forest vista. "You can see her lights from here, and then you don't see 'em again till we've gone half a mile more. After that she's in plain view. It's gettin' pretty cold—seems to you, I expect—but you'll find the big cabin warm enough. Easterners always are strong on pilin' on the wood."

Rattle, rattle, bump, bump, those last five miles, for they had left the smoother motor road. Then the lights burst into full view. The long ranch house—cabin—Judith didn't know what to call it—was lighted from end to end. It stretched hospitably along almost the very edge of a cliff, from which there was presumably a far view to be had. But the traveller had no thought of any but near views. She got down from the car, Shorty slung her luggage on his arms, and the two proceeded toward the house, over a short stretch of grass.

The door opened, letting out a flood of light. A tall figure in high boots appeared in the doorway, a voice accosted them. Not Rawley's voice.

"Hi, Shorty! Who you bringin'?"

"Don't know. Expect she'll tell you."

The tall figure—of course it must be Dave, Judith thought—came forward across the wide, log-pillared porch. He met her as she started up the steps. In the half light his sturdy bronzed face looked the question he didn't ask.

"Is Mr. Rawley Kent here?"

The bronzed face became graver.

"No, ma'am."

"But this is where he lives?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"May I come in? I am Mrs. Kent."

"Yes, ma'am." An instant's hesitation. "Excuse me. We wasn't expectin' you, or we'd have been meetin' you." His tone was more cordial.

Judith paid the driver, and Dave took the bags from him.

"Hop round to the kitchen, Shorty. Bumpy'll fix you up with somethin' hot. Come in, ma'am. We're expectin' Mr. Kent back to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!"

"Yes'm. He's away on business. A friend o' his is here."

He stood aside and let her precede him. She came into the big room, with its great fireplace

of blazing logs in the farther centre, its reading lights concentrated on a long table covered with a litter of magazines and rows of books. She stood still, looking, feeling a little dazed. To have come so far and not to find Rawley! Even twenty-four hours seemed an impossible time to wait at the end of her wearisome journey.

A man's figure had risen from a chair before the fire, half hidden by the table and lamps. He stood waiting. Dave called out, above the snap and crackle of the fire, upon which fresh fuel had a minute before been thrown:

"Father!"

In spite of Judith's introduction of herself, Dave felt he needed help in this emergency. Just what to do with this lovely, sophisticated-looking young person who said she was Mrs. Kent he didn't exactly know. How could he tell whether she was what she said? All he knew was that Mr. Kent seldom heard from her and never spoke of her.

The bishop came round the end of the table as Judith advanced into the room. A moment later the two had crossed the intervening space, and the bishop was holding both the visitor's hands, his fine face beaming.

"My dear child!"

"My dear Bishop Chipman! Oh, how splendid to find you here!"

"You hadn't heard that? I've been here with Rawley for almost two months."

They looked at each other intently, smiling. Dave, viewing them with interest from a respectful distance, was relieved to find that everything was regular; that this wasn't a second Mrs. Vickers, with whom he had had trouble enough. The bishop led Judith to the hearth, gently relieved her of her coat. She pulled off her close hat, revealing more clearly a face at sight of which Dave felt inclined to whistle softly but managed to refrain. How in the world had Mr. Rawley managed to stay away from this girl—she looked like a girl to him—all these months? Why, that Mrs. Vickers had nothing on her—she was old and faded beside this beautiful person. Dave couldn't fathom it. Well, he didn't need to—he would know at sight of Mr. Kent's face how he felt about her.

"Have you had anything to eat, Judith? You can't have, if you came in on the four forty-five. . . . Dave——"

"Yes, sir. I'll tell Bumpy."

Judith turned to the tall Westerner in his

ranchman's clothes. She liked his looks. "If I might have just a cup of tea," she said, "and some bread and butter——"

"We can do better for you'n that," promised Dave, and went out. He immediately had Bumpy on the jump. Meanwhile, the bishop and his visitor talked eagerly—without touching upon the object of Judith's unexpected visit, though the bishop didn't hesitate to mention his host in an entirely natural way. Surprisingly soon a tray was brought in which would have tempted any tired and hungry traveller. Sliced cold venison, some excellent fried potatoes, steaming hot coffee with thick cream, re-heated crisp rolls and delicious butter, fruit—such fruit as could only have come a long distance and cost considerable money. Judith remembered well enough how much Rawley liked all sorts of rare and imported fruits; how he frequently had made a full breakfast of them, with hot rolls and drip coffee. Yes, this tasted precisely like that coffee to which he and she had been used at home. Rawley had liked to make it himself, at the table.

"He hasn't turned *all* cowboy," she said to herself with some relief.

While she ate, with more appetite than she

would have thought, the bishop, who had been beckoned outside, conferred with Dave.

"Shall I fix up Mr. Kent's room for her?" Dave asked anxiously.

The bishop considered—strangely enough, to Dave.

"There's another guest room, across from mine, isn't there, Dave?"

"Yes, sir. It used to be Mrs. Langhorne's."

"It has a fireplace, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Make up a roaring fire there, please; air the room, and see to plenty of clean towels."

"You bet. I'll have it all ready in a jiffy."

Dave went away, still wondering. Queer—the whole thing was queer—as it had been, all along. Except that he supposed Mr. Kent had come West for his health, while his lady couldn't, for some reason—or wouldn't, maybe—leave the East.

The elder man returned to Judith.

"Bishop—I had to come. Things were getting so—very difficult."

"I am very glad you did come, my dear."

"Please tell me—how Rawley is."

The bishop looked into the fire. The one thing his judicial mind told him was that, having re-

ceived a certain amount of Rawley's confidence, yet not enough to give him much idea as to how the husband now felt about his wife, he, the bishop, must not mess things up by talking the situation over with Judith or giving her advice of any sort. Let Rawley return to-morrow night and encounter whatever there was for him to encounter, without benefit of clergy. Only these two could settle their own affairs. Much as he loved them both, all he could do, he was sure, was to stand by and see what happened. If they should come to an impasse, perhaps then he might do his best to help them round it. Certainly he ought not to stay on longer if it all turned out as he devoutly hoped.

"He's very well. I think I never saw him looking better. He's away now to look over again, before buying, several horses Dave helped him select a week ago. Usually Dave is with him on such trips—sometimes I go myself. But I woke this morning with a slight indisposition. Rawley wouldn't let me go, and insisted on Dave's staying to look after me. I think we've both felt imprisoned all day, especially since I've been quite myself since noon."

"Rawley's off alone, then?"

The bishop thought he caught a touch of solici-

tude. He had no doubt Rawley's wife was feeling as he himself had felt when he first came into these mountains, a sense of the vast loneliness of them. The drive out to the ranch over the narrow road in the deepening dusk would have accentuated the inevitable impression of a stranger. As a matter of fact, even staying for a considerable period in this solitary place hardly changed that impression. So he hastened to reassure her.

"He was to pick up a guide at Shepherd's, a horse owner and buyer whom Dave recommended, to confirm his estimate of the quality of the horses under consideration. Rawley's a pretty keen judge himself, but as I understand it there's no knowing too well how to buy them in this country."

"I suppose not. Yes, Rawley was brought up on horseback. Before he stopped playing polo—and I've no idea why he stopped it—he was considered the best horseman on Long Island."

"I remember. You ride and jump in perfect form yourself, I believe."

"I used to. . . . Bishop—you don't think Rawley may be delayed—not be back by to-morrow night?"

"My dear—" he smiled, though his eyes

beneath their dark brows were piercing—"have you an engagement in the East which you can just make by starting back the day after to-morrow?"

"I don't wonder you ask. I wish I could talk with you—a little—before Rawley comes."

A look of reserve again came into the bishop's face. Its genial expression changed slightly, became not exactly stern but certainly noncommittal. "Do you know," he said quietly, "I somehow feel that—except to receive you to-night and make it clear to that doubting Thomas, Dave, that you are really Mrs. Kent—it would have been better if I hadn't been here? The nearest I can come to effacing myself is not to let you consult with me about your husband. I would rather you saw him—got the first impression of him—exactly as you would have done if he had met you at his door."

She considered it. Her own face took on a touch of pride and reserve, replacing the softer expression of almost daughterly feeling which she had bestowed upon the bishop. She drew herself up a very little and gave him a charming if slightly withdrawn smile.

"I am sure you are quite right," she said. "Thank you for being so wise."

XXXI

Hoofbeats long listened for. Is the rider the same who once sat an Eastern saddle? None the less, he's a horse-man and walks his horse in

SHE hardly knew how she got through the next twenty-four hours. Although everything was strange to her and would have been exceedingly interesting if she had not been so preoccupied, the time dragged. She spent a partially restless night in the pleasant guest room with its walls of oiled and panelled wood, its chintz-hung windows, its simple but adequate furnishings, and its friendly fireplace. Dropping into a weary sleep before morning, she woke shivering. Dave, however, had left plenty of firewood and had even instructed her before he left her the night before how to build herself a quick fire by which to dress.

Breakfast with the bishop—Dave wouldn't come in, in spite of an urgent invitation—was a memorable affair, the table set in the sunshine-windowed end of the big living room, the food hearty and delicious. After breakfast they went

out into the cold, clear, invigorating air. They looked at the view from various points, strolled up a back trail. They talked of many things, but not, any more, of Rawley. But of Rawley they both were thinking, and of little else.

Judith had brought with her certain carefully chosen sports clothes—she put them on in the morning and wore them all day. A hand-knitted suit of deep crimson wool with black stripes, a leather jacket to match, a clever little black hat, thick gray stockings, thick-soled flat-heeled shoes. The bishop had at once appreciated this fitting change from the formal travelling wear in which she had arrived.

“You make me think of a Kentucky cardinal,” he said. “You’re the high light in our picture. And you look about——”

“Be careful, dear Bishop. I don’t want to look too young. You know this sort of outfit is misleading.”

“How old are you, my dear?”

“All of twenty-seven—every bit of it.”

He laughed. “How you young people do imagine yourselves getting on before you’re even out of the twenties. Now I, at fifty-five, think of myself as a still youthful and vigorous man. Even taking into consideration that I have as many

gray hairs as black ones doesn't make me feel old."

"How could it? You never will be old. And at the present moment, even with the gray hairs—most becoming gray hairs—you look as though you could climb mountains and not even stop for breath."

"Ah, but I couldn't, though I have much more endurance than when I came, soft from travel and public speaking, with little chance for exercise. It puts new life into a man to breathe this air. And it's very interesting to be gradually initiated into the customs of the country, which include no more softness than may be had in Rawley's ranch house—which is quite enough."

It didn't matter what they talked of, she couldn't keep her mind on it. She tried to spur herself, but continually fell silent, even in the company of this distinguished person, whom she had always thought of as the most delightful of conversationalists. He understood, and made few demands upon her. After the noonday meal, which Dave announced as dinner, the bishop disappeared for a long time, leaving Judith to wander about by herself or sleep if she could, to make up arrears. She couldn't. Dave kept away

also. She thought, by four o'clock, she had paced up and down the long room a thousand times, though she had spent many intervals upon the porch, looking off at the thrilling view. But always she was waiting. . . . Waiting. . . . Would he be there by dinner time? He must be. She couldn't endure it longer.

He wasn't there when she and the bishop sat down together for the third meal of the day. She forced herself to eat and to respond to her companion's occasional observations. He didn't bother her by keeping up a running fire of talk. If all bishops were so comprehending they would be the most sought-after people in the world!

Darkness had long fallen, and she had gone into her own room to sit by the fire which Dave—at the bishop's suggestion—had kept going for her there all day. The room would have been chilly, otherwise, and one must have a place, the older man knew, where one could be warm and quiet and keep one's self pulled together, awaiting a momentous hour.

Then, suddenly, in the stillness, came the faint sound of hoofbeats on the road—it was a hard road from this end of the Langhorne ranch in to the house, a matter of a quarter of a mile. They were not the quick, ringing hoofbeats she

had expected. Whoever was coming was walking his horse in—to cool him down, of course. She might have known that; she was enough of a horsewoman to remember that only in emergencies, the pressing need for haste, are good horses trotted or galloped home after hours of exercise. This was a fast walk, however, the walk of a well-bred animal. Of course Rawley would have no other. She hurriedly put out her light, slid one of her windows open a crack, and listened. Her room faced the corral and the cabin stables; the rider must pass close by those windows.

She heard the door of the bunkhouse slam. A lively whistle pierced the air. Dave, of course—perhaps Bumpy the cook. The whistle ceased—the two spoke low.

“He’s ridin’ her home, leavin’ Jocko over there. That’s why you don’t hear no nicker. She’s a stranger. Nervous—you can hear it in that walk. She ain’t more’n touchin’ the ground here an’ there.”

“I’ll say he’s got a winner. The best of the string he’s buyin’. Some mare. She’s got sense.”

The hoofbeats came nearer, into the yard. The two men waited in silence. Judith could see their dark forms in the faint light from the distant kitchen, an outer building connected by

a covered way with the ranch house proper. A moment later horse and rider came into the same area of half light. A slender-legged animal, a tall, slim rider, who sat still in his saddle as the others approached with caution. Their voices were all low pitched, but in the still night air they carried perfectly.

"Couldn't stand it not to bring this one home myself," said Rawley's familiar voice. Familiar—was it that? If she hadn't known it was his, would she have quite recognized it? It had always had a slight—very slight—drawl, even when he was fairly excited. Now—it was crisper, though controlled. And—deeper? Perhaps. She listened with every nerve taut.

"You bet you couldn't."

"I'll be doggoned if she ain't the purtiest critter," almost whispered Bumpy.

"She's as nearly perfect as they make 'em," said Rawley exultantly.

"And broke," added Dave—"broke as nice as she needs to be for a real horseman like you. Don't you let nobody else ride her, though, from now on. She's your mare."

"She is, and I won't."

The conversation went on, while Rawley dismounted and stood fondling the mare's nose.

Judith could see her outlines—they were precisely what her master would require. Slender, yet with a certain sturdiness; grace and beauty in every turn of the head.

But nothing mattered except the sight of her husband. Often she had seen him in riding dress, correct from head to foot according to Eastern standards. Now she saw him dressed much as were the two young men with him, yet with something about him—a distinction—a grace—that they lacked. The talk was all about this mare, and others to be considered. Finally the animal was led away by Rawley himself, striding across the area of light, alert, eager, apparently happy, like a mettlesome boy with his first Shetland pony.

Dave and Bumpy had been warned by the bishop.

“Mrs. Kent wishes to surprise her husband. She will be alone in the big room when he comes in.”

Dave and Bumpy found this natural. They suppressed the desire to inform Mr. Kent that a lady awaited him. They let him go into the house alone, though he called back to Dave, “Come along in and I’ll tell you all about it. I’ve had a great time over there.”

"Got some stuff to see to. Be in later," Dave called back.

"Gee, she'll be some surprise," mumbled Bumpy.

"She's a blue ribboner," assented Dave. "His own kind."

"Take his mind all off the mare."

"If she don't——" But Dave didn't finish that. He had long passed, in his relations with Mr. Rawley Kent, the stage of exchanging with his cook more than surface confidences concerning him. Bumpy was a good cook and had a good enough head, but Dave himself had been taken by Rawley where Bumpy would never go. The rich, newly made young rancher and the seasoned young manager had lain out under the stars together on a midsummer night and talked of a lot of things that Bumpy wouldn't understand in a thousand years. Dave would never forget that.

Judith had stolen out of her room, along the gallery upon which it opened, down the wide staircase and over to the fire. In her crimson knitted suit—it was precisely the shade of Rawley's Harvard ribbon—she stood in the firelight and waited. The quick footsteps of the owner of the ranch took him straight to that room; he

must find out how his friend the bishop was feeling after his touch of illness. He flung open the door, took three steps into the room—and stopped, staring. The next instant he pulled off his wide hat, went back and closed the door, and again stood still. Judith, with every pulse beating madly at sight of the face she had come so far to see, waited. She had made a thousand plans as to what to say when she saw her husband. Every one of them forsook her. All she knew was that, standing there, his deeply tanned face lighting not at all at sight of her, his brilliant eyes under low-drawn eyebrows studying her, his slim body in its Western dress drawn up straight like an arrow, he was to her instantly more desirable than he had ever been. Even before he spoke, she knew that Rawley was now such a man as she had never known.

At last he came toward her, flinging his hat aside. He met her upon the hearthstone, for she had not been able to advance a step to meet him. She had never felt less adequate to a situation in her life. But she put out her hand.

He took it, but after one firm pressure he relinquished it. She and Rawley shaking hands! He made no motion toward any other sort of greeting. He just stood looking at her as though

he couldn't quite believe her presence there and—that was the way it seemed to her—didn't know what to do about it.

“When did you come?”

“Last evening.”

“Had you wired? I didn't get it.”

“No, I hadn't wired.”

“Who brought you over?”

As though it mattered! He was asking perfectly needless questions, as people do upon meeting, no matter how momentous the meeting may be.

“A young man they called Shorty.”

“I suppose everything they could do has been done for your comfort?”

“Oh, yes.”

She wanted to have him open his arms and take her in. In the light of the past months she couldn't quite expect him to do so, yet the wish rose up in her and devoured her. There was a horsey, leathery smell about him; he needed a shave; his hands—Rawley's hands—were undeniably soiled. It could hardly be otherwise, since he hadn't stopped to erase the consequences of his hours in the saddle before rushing in to look after the bishop. She didn't mind these things in the least. She wanted to be swept up, her face against that prickly, tanned cheek, and held as

though he could never let her go again. But this was incredibly—yet after all, logically—not what she got.

“I’d better go and make myself presentable. Do you know if the bishop’s all right? I expected to find him here by the fire.”

“He’s perfectly well, I think. He and I have been all over the place to-day.”

“How did you like it?”

“I think it’s a wonderful spot. I never saw more beautiful scenery.”

“There isn’t any . . . If you will excuse me. . . . I’m pretty dirty, and I haven’t had any supper.”

“Of course. Please go and get it.”

And he went, closing the door carefully behind him. He met his friend the bishop in the corridor. Judith heard Rawley’s exclamation of pleasure. Sounds carried easily in this unplastered house.

“Oh, I’m glad to see you’re all right, Father. I’ve had you on my mind the whole time. Thank you for looking after Judith, as she tells me you’ve done.”

“It was a delight to me to see her, Rawley.”

His greeting of the bishop had sounded far more friendly than his reception of herself. Judith smothered an unhappy sigh. It was clearly evident that he considered her an alien

as far as his life with her was concerned. She thought she understood. He still believed that she wanted a divorce, and that since he had declined to come to her she had made her journey to have the talk with him she had asked for, to arrange matters. And—this was already certain—as she had comprehended at the first sight of him—he was not the Rawley Kent who had gone away eight months ago. How to deal with him! She didn't know. Since his first unexpected sight of her hadn't taken him off his feet and made him instinctively welcome her as his wife there undoubtedly was going to be difficulty in softening his pride—changing his will—reviving his old love for her. Up to this hour of meeting, whatever else had been her questionings, she had hardly doubted that he could hold out against her for a moment. Obviously he could. How strange—how strange that was!

The bishop came in and took his old place by the fire. She knew he wouldn't stay long to delay the talk she and Rawley must have together.

"He's looking remarkably well, isn't he?" the bishop suggested.

"Yes, wonderfully—far better than I have ever seen him."

"He's been very keen on acquiring his horses,

one by one; he's a pretty good judge of horse-flesh."

"He always was."

The bishop told her an amusing story acquired from Dave, of whom he was fond. Presently they fell silent. And in due course Rawley returned to them. Judith had expected to see him in the sort of dress to which he had been used, but he had merely changed, as was now his custom, to clean outdoor Western wear. He looked, however, as fresh as a bath, a shave, and a hot dinner, kept for him by Bumpy, could make him. Those decidedly informal clothes were undeniably attractive, Judith realized, but she had expected him to show more convention in honour of her presence.

She wondered if he meant to accentuate the change in his environment, virtually to assert to her that he was at home and contented in these surroundings, rough as they were compared with those he had known all his life. Rawley in a dinner coat, his black tie perfectly tied under his square chin. He would hardly have fitted here. Rawley in a gray flannel shirt and corduroys! He did seem to fit. Had his chin always been as square as that? Chins don't change, but somehow the flannel shirt and loose black scarf seemed to

bring out that squareness. And if he had seemed to his wife desirable just as he had first appeared, dusty and unshaven, now in his characteristic personal cleanliness, his tanned cheek freshly shaven, his eyes carrying a look more direct—or so it seemed—than of old, he had now even greater magnetism for her. But it was not the old magnetism, it was new, and the essence of it was his immeasurably heightened virility.

The bishop stayed with them for a half hour, during which the subject of the conversation was horses—and only horses—except that Rawley, in his account of his experiences, had somewhat to say about the men with whom he had been dealing. For the first time since his arrival Judith saw him smile. He had recounted an amusing occurrence, over which the bishop had doubled up with laughter, and she herself, momentarily diverted, had also smiled. But Rawley had turned instantly grave again. And then the bishop, himself telling a story of a different sort, had taken himself out of the room on the wave of its effective climax and had left the pair alone again. It was certain that he would not come back.

Now! what was to come next? Whatever it was to be, it began with a long silence.

XXXII

A host sees that his guest is made comfortable. What more could a guest ask for?

SHE sat upon the deep couch which stretched its comfortable length in front of the hearth. Rawley had not taken the obvious place beside her; instead he had drawn up a chair slightly removed. Not one of the two armchairs which stood at either side of the hearth, inviting occupancy; the chair he chose was a plain Windsor, easily moved, and demanding uprightness of body in the sitter. This act alone seemed to Judith to put up an additional barrier between them. Not even would he come near enough to her to reach out and touch her hand!

Rawley said slowly, "I don't know where to begin. I suppose you do. I can't even seem to start off on any ordinary conversation."

"I don't want to. I want to talk. And yet—like you—I don't know how to begin."

They regarded each other, unsmiling. Judith hardly knew how enchanting her face was, in the

firelight, with the crimson of her dress accentuating her own colour. Yet she had counted somewhat on her own beauty to have its old effect on him, to reach his heart, and her last glance into the guest-room mirror assured her that she possessed that beauty in generous measure. Yet there must be something more than mere charm of looks to reach him now. He must understand her to the full. More important yet, she must understand him.

"I think you'll have to begin, Judith. I'm absolutely at sea as to why you've come. You had only to say the word to have me do my part in giving you your freedom."

"You think that's what I want?"

"I do. Why shouldn't you? You'd begun to tire of me two years ago. The last year we were together—we weren't together at all. I don't know of anything that's happened to change that. On the contrary, I suppose a great deal has happened to widen the breach."

She couldn't keep on looking into those brilliant dark eyes, their brows a little drawn together, deepening the sternness of them.

"I begin to think," she said, staring now into the fire, "that a great deal has happened on your side to widen the breach."

"There has."

Startled, she had no words. Rawley sat perfectly still, his arms folded, one knee crossed over the other. It was an attitude of quiet self-confidence. Here apparently was no anxious husband, ready at a word to kneel at her feet and call her his once more. She felt something unyielding in him, an inflexibility as different from his old complaisance as his Montana mountains were different from the flat streets of New York. She was almost afraid of him. How extraordinary—to be afraid of Rawley!

"You may as well tell me," she said, very low.

"It's not what I could tell you—now."

She suddenly stood up. He rose instantly also, his height greater than hers, his arms still folded. She wondered, in a queer little flash of observation, if a man knows what a look of power, advantage, those folded arms give him. Letting them hang quietly at his side denotes poise, perhaps; shoving them into his pockets good humour and a willingness to be logical, reasonable, even humorous; crossing them firmly upon his breast with his head well up makes him into the coolly dominating male. For this certainly was what Rawley was now. And—no woman can throw herself into a pair of folded arms!

"I haven't come all this way—for silence," she said.

"I know you haven't. I'm very willing to talk things over. But I'm wondering if we'd better do it to-night."

She had a moment of inspiration. "No, we won't do it to-night. It's too soon. If you will let me stay a few days perhaps we can come at it gradually."

A strange hint of a smile touched his lips. "Certainly I'll let you stay a few days," he said. "As many as you like. It would be a shame to come out to Montana and go back on the next train. If you had a riding habit with you I'd take you out to-morrow and show you something of the country. From the back of a horse is the real way to see it."

"I have a riding habit," she said. "It was the only thing I could think of to bring besides my travelling clothes and these I have on. And I hoped you'd do just that—show me what you can of the country. Meanwhile—shall I go to my room and go to bed?"

"That depends on how tired you are and how you slept last night."

"I slept very little last night. I was—I suppose—too excited at being under your roof."

He didn't look at her, as she had expected. She couldn't read him at all.

"Shall you sleep better to-night?" he asked, as evenly as though she hadn't said anything unusual—under the present circumstances.

"I don't know. If I don't—it will be because *you* are here to-night."

She saw him set his lips. She heard a deep breath drawn. Her heart leaped. But in the next moment he was the new, controlled Rawley again.

"I'll go and see about your fire. I hope Dave's been keeping it up. It gets pretty cold up here these October nights."

"It's a delicious cold. And Dave has kept my room warm as toast all day. I like Dave."

"He's the best fellow I know."

He went out, was gone a few minutes, and came back.

"I've been hunting out some extra blankets," he explained. "The mercury's dropping fast, and—you sleep with all your windows open. I'd suggest your keeping closed the one at the foot of your bed—you'll get all you need from the others."

She stood still upon the hearth rug, which was

a great brown bearskin. She *couldn't* leave him yet.

"I hate to go—quite so early. Couldn't you tell me about—perhaps about these horses you're buying and what you mean to do?"

"Of course, if you like."

He talked for perhaps half an hour. He was fluent enough now, natural, interested. She tried to listen, and did succeed in hearing enough to make her occasional assents and questions seem intelligent. But all the time, as she watched him, she was stirred by his presence, so stirred that what he said hardly counted. The old intense attraction he had had for her before their marriage, and during those first years afterward, was upon her. It was by no means solely a physical attraction; it was much more than that. She recalled vividly how it had been then; there had existed what seemed a marvellous oneness of spirit between them, so that across a roomful of people she could feel his presence, think his thoughts, know that she was part and parcel of him. He had felt the same way about it; again and again he had wondered at it.

What if she should remind him now of that experience which had seemed to them so sacred?

No, how could she, when he admitted that something had happened on his side of the relationship which had widened the breach between them. She must wait till he had told her what that was.

If it was Natalie Vickers . . . But even if it was, she wouldn't lose him without a fight. A polite, controlled, even smiling fight, but still with a desperate intent behind it.

She rose once more. "Thank you, Rawley—that's been very interesting. I do want to know all I may about the life out here, because it's absorbed you so and made you so strong and well. The man who brought me over here told me you had bought this ranch."

"Yes, just last week. It's grown upon me so, I couldn't think of not owning it. You know I'd visited Chester Langhorne here seven years ago, and I liked the place not only for itself but because of him. He says he wouldn't have sold it to anybody but me. I don't know how that may be, but he's invalided now, in San Francisco, confined to his bed, and not long to live, apparently. I went out to see him a month ago and found him eager to let me have the place. He put thousands more into it than he asked me for it; said he couldn't expect anybody to pay for

all the little refinements he'd added. I think he'd have given me the whole thing if I'd have taken it from him. If you knew what most of the ranch houses are you'd appreciate the mad luxury of this."

"I do. I had no idea I'd find a bath opening from my room, and gallons of hot water, and hand-blocked chintz curtains at my windows."

"I didn't appreciate that last item myself. It was Mrs. Langhorne's room, which accounts for it."

They had come down to talking together like any two people, not particularly well acquainted. She could bear no more of it.

"I'm really going this time," she said. And held out her hand. "Good-night, dear sir. You are a most delightful host, but I do have those arrears of sleep to make up."

Their hands met again—the hands of host and guest parting for the night! She could feel how hard Rawley's was, his palm toughened by calluses. She turned it over and looked at it.

"Not quite the typical hand of a musician now," she commented, smiling. "I don't know what I expected to find here, but I did imagine that whatever else you had there would certainly somehow be a piano."

"I think it's been sheer cowardice—the fear of seeming effeminate in the eyes of Dave and the rest—that's kept me from having one here. But one is actually on the way right now from San Francisco. Even Dave approves, so I'm sure that stage of his and the other boys' idea of me is past. And I don't think the calluses will have entirely spoiled what touch I have."

"I should hope not. I should like to hear a bit of Tschaikowsky to-night."

"So should I. But it may be as well we can't."

"Lacking it—I'm off."

She went straight to the door, aware somehow that his eyes were following her. Then she heard his footsteps behind her, coming along with her into the passage. For one wildly expectant instant she thought he might be going to snatch her into his arms and, unable to hold out against her nearness, take her into his own room. . . . No, he was only seeing her to the door of her own, opening it for her, casting a glance at her fire, and standing aside to let her go in. It was all she could do now not to turn and put herself into his arms, which were not folded now, barring her away. But that—she knew it instantly—would be foolishness. And it wasn't really what she wanted. If she could win him back it must

be not by sheer appeal to his senses, breaking down his will. It must be by that subtler invocation of the old fusion of spirit as well as body which had made their marriage so perfect. Until they could be sure of that, better this.

She turned to give him only the shadow of a smile, a swift "Good-night," to which he replied as any friendly host might do, "Good-night, Judith. Sleep well." And the door closed between them.

It was even harder to find sleep to-night than it had been the night before. Only a few feet away—she knew his room was next hers—was her husband. Several times in the long hours she thought she heard him move about; once she was sure he opened his door. She lay listening, her hand on her beating heart. But when she had closed her door hours before she had very softly locked it. Even if he should come she didn't mean to open it—at once. But he did not come. And at last she fell asleep.

XXXIII

Not a Brahms Symphony but "The Star-Spangled Banner." And with all that magnificent scenery outside, too!

As is well known, moods change overnight. When Judith woke in her sun-filled room it was to a sense of high adventure. Gone were the restless longings of the evening before, though the purpose remained, reinforced by considerable rest and sleep. Rawley was bearing himself like a man; she would show herself a woman of spirit. She would give him a day of blithe comradeship, without a word about the future.

She came into the living room in her riding habit. It was a russet affair which she had picked up at the last moment, with an instinctive knowledge that the severe black of her Eastern and impeccably correct riding clothes might easily look absurd along Montana's autumn trails. An orange scarf tying her tan shirt, a soft brown hat—the stiff black bowler or top hat wasn't to be thought of. She didn't want to be correct, she wanted to be as informal and colourful as

might be. As she had donned these garments after her morning bath she had congratulated herself that she had had sense enough to bring them.

Her first sight of Rawley, who met her as she came in, showed her that he was both surprised and pleased. He was less unbending this morning; he hardly could be stiff with the smiling young person who appeared before him looking like a wood nymph or a brownie, or—a beautiful woman dressed most artfully to match her environment.

“All ready for the start?” he greeted her, very evident relief in his voice. His handshake was friendly, he also was smiling. Somehow, to both of them, everything must look different in the clear sunlight. They were to have a day together as though nothing had ever happened, postponing any necessary discussion of the way matters stood between them until they had had a little chance to observe each other.

“All ready and eager to be off. I suppose you have a horse for me, or you wouldn’t have suggested our going.”

“Yes. Dave went over to Shepherd’s—the dude ranch you passed last night—and borrowed one that’s broken to the feminine touch.”

Her face fell a little. "You know the sort of mount I've always ridden. I like them mettlesome."

"You do, and can ride that sort like a horse-woman. But you don't want to be thrown in the first two minutes, and those I have here aren't broken to women riders. I think you'll find this horse Dave brought over a pretty good one. He wasn't brought in till the last of the season, so hasn't had a chance to degenerate into a dude ranch hack. They're trained to stand like a rock while a fat woman climbs into the saddle and shrieks back farewells to her friends on the ground. He's been ridden by only one woman, I believe, and she's done well by him."

She wondered if the woman were Natalie Vickers, but she didn't inquire. "That's all right, then," she acknowledged.

They had breakfast, and some good talk with the bishop, whom Rawley invited to accompany them.

"I have," explained the bishop genially, "some nine letters to answer this morning."

"Must it be letters?" Judith rallied him. "Couldn't it be some other less threadbare excuse?"

"It couldn't, my dear, because they exist, and

should have been replied to yesterday—which I more or less devoted to you. No, you can't get me away from Rawley's very convenient guest desk in my room this morning. Good-bye, and I hope you will be as awed by the scenery up the valley as I was when I saw it first."

They got off, Judith on a handsome roan horse whose coat shone from the extra curry Dave had given it, Rawley on his newly bought mare. The bishop and Dave, watching them go, exchanged comments.

"What a pair," said the bishop musingly. "I've seen them at many a meet, the centre of interest because of their looks and their horsemanship. But they please me more to-day, somehow—they seem to fit this country."

"That there Mrs. Kent," announced Dave, "is about the prettiest thing I've ever seen. Yessir, and she knows how to ride—I saw that the minute she walked up to Firefly. And he knew it the minute she slid into the saddle. They'll have a nice ride, if Firefly don't make the new mare nervous—and I guess Mr. Kent can take care of that. She'll do a little dancin', but that's all right. She's got to learn to travel in company."

So the day began.

It was a strange day, in spite of every effort

both of them made to make it seem natural. Judith saw magnificent scenery, sometimes from a trail which suddenly emerged from the forest, again from a smooth motor road built to show off the country. They stopped at a ranch inn for lunch—a good one. They covered no great distance, made frequent stops, and talked in short sputs followed by long silences.

As the day advanced into late afternoon Judith began to grow restless and uneasy again. Rawley made no effort to introduce the subject which lay between them. Judith did not want to. She had said one or two provocative things to him last night, just before she closed her door; he hadn't responded. She could do no more. Let him break the silence now. She couldn't have believed he wouldn't do it sometime during this day together.

As they came within sight of the house signs of high activity were to be made out in the distance. A big truck stood before the door, a number of men were at work; the figure of Dave was dominating the labour.

"The piano at last!" Rawley exclaimed. "What luck it should come while you're here."

Judith thought it was certainly luck. If the presence of a splendid piano wouldn't bring them

together what would! Music! It had been their first point of contact. To hear Rawley play again—if he would really play for her as he used to do! Her hopes leaped again. But he would—she would make him.

The horses led away, the two stood watching the unloading.

"Let's go in and pick out the place for it," Rawley proposed, as the big body of the grand piano—Judith would have known he would have nothing else—was being brought slowly across an improvised gangway. They went in and surveyed the room.

"There are several places that might do. What would you think of the east end of the room, with the light coming over the shoulder? Too far away from the fireplace on cold nights?"

"No—we have a heating plant for winter—the room will be warm all over. That's really the best place, I should say. We'll try it there."

In due course the great shining instrument was set up in the designated spot, moved a little, one way or the other, at Judith's suggestion, till it seemed settled precisely where it belonged.

"It finishes the room. I don't know what you've done without it," Judith said.

"Neither do I. Now that it's here it couldn't be bought from me at any price, at the cost of another month's delay. Let's have the bench, Dave—I want to try it out."

The men lingered. Rawley, seating himself, glancing at them over his shoulder, spread his hands over the keys, holding them poised.

"It may need tuning again, after the trip, but I don't believe it's badly off. What'll you have, boys? We'll let you christen it."

The men grinned. Dave spoke for them. "They'll like somethin' loud and strong," he suggested. "Maybe—somethin' kind o' big, like the pianner. Looks like little tinklin' tunes wouldn't come out of that. Speak up, boys. Remember you're christenin' this big black bozo you carried in. What'll it be?"

"The Star-Spangled Banner," offered Bumpy, who stood nearest, by right of his connection with this ranch. He looked very proud and pleased, feeling himself, compared with the truckmen, at least part owner.

"Good choice," declared Rawley, and crashed into the familiar strains. Calluses or no calluses, his fingers hadn't lost their touch. And he made of the national air a swelling, beating, thrilling thing which set every drop of blood in

his listeners' bodies coursing more rapidly. The big spaces of the room seemed filled with the thunder of it. Even Judith, to whom the familiar air had long since become a patriotic commonplace, felt its strong appeal, under Rawley's hands. The superb tone of the instrument, apparently unimpaired by its journey, seemed to her beyond that of the one which they had had at home. Or was it that the bare floors and distant walls, with Rawley's vigour of performance, created an illusion of power sufficient to inspire armies?

The men's feet were unconsciously beating an obbligato; their faces, usually solemn when they were in the presence of even one stranger, were lighted up. Rawley played their choice through three times, embroidering his harmonies, altering his deeper chords, and making his theme almost symphonic. When at last he stopped he was rewarded by an audible murmur of approval and admiration, as well as a few comments.

"By Jaspers!"

"You bet she shore 'nuff can talk."

"Better'n the radio."

"Radio's all right—I like to *see* what's makin' the big noise."

"Much obliged, Mr. Kent. Guess we'd better be goin' along."

"Go by way of the kitchen, boys, and have some coffee and doughnuts. Bumpy——"

"Yes, sir—I'm on my way. Come on, fellas."

They went, their big boots clumping as softly as they were able to make them. The bishop and Judith were the only members of the audience left. They were sitting together in a window seat.

"Rawley," said the bishop, "I wish that piano had come sooner, so I might have heard more of your amazing music. You have me wanting to shoulder arms myself. In fact, I've got to do just that. I had a wire to-day which makes my presence in New York at the earliest moment imperative. So I leave to-night."

Rawley got up, came over to him.

"What am I going to do without you, Father?"

"The question to me is, What am I going to do without you?"

"How about taking me on as an altar boy?"

Judith left them talking it over. She wondered whether the bishop really had had such a message or whether he were doing a little forgivable fiction making for her sake. She supposed she would never know. But, much as she loved him, it would be better for her cause to have him

gone. She wished he could marry the Rawley Kents all over again before he went.

But he couldn't—they weren't ready. After supper Rawley took him to the station in a small rough-and-ready motor car whose presence Judith hadn't before discovered. He didn't ask his wife to go along. The bishop had a word with her before he left, while his luggage was being brought out.

"My dear—he's worth keeping. May I say I hope nobody is to be substituted for him in your life?"

"Father—is that really what he thinks?"

"It's what we both suppose, though to me it has been incredible. I won't ask you for the truth, I only beg you to think twice—three times—before you let anybody take his place."

"But I don't know whether—he——"

There was no chance to finish it; Rawley was with them again, after a minute's absence. The car was waiting.

"God bless you, my children, as bishops should always say. I mean it—in a very special way."

They knew he did. Dave, Bumpy, several of the ranch hands had assembled to see the guest go. They had come to like him thoroughly.

"Good-bye, Dave. Good-bye, Bumpy. Good-

bye, Nate." He shook each hard hand. His own grasp was firm, not yielding to theirs.

"Good-bye, Father. Shore wish you luck."

"Same here, sir."

"An' here."

"Me, too. Hope you'll come again."

He was gone with Rawley. Judith went back into the house. She had changed her riding clothes for the knitted crimson sports things; the day in the open had given her a rich colour which needed no enhancing. She sat down at the piano and softly touched its keys. Presently she was playing. The golden tones enchanted her, life flowed into her, as always, at the sound of the music she loved. Oh, if it could just bring them together again! It couldn't be that they were really far apart.

XXXIV

The Western Branch of the Listening Post opens a door.

Perhaps he meant to. Couldn't help it, somehow

SHE had left the piano a little before Rawley came back and had gone to the windows to look out down the road on which he would return. She was still standing there when she heard the car dash in. Then he was in the room with her, crossing to her with a long stride, holding out a telegram.

"I got this at the station. They were about to telephone it in when I stopped the operator and had him type it out for you. I don't know what's in it, of course, but I don't like telephoning messages, in any case. I hope it's good news."

He went over to the fireplace and stood there, with his back to her. She opened the envelope quickly. At home in New York telegrams were such an everyday occurrence that she never expected them to be heavy with bad news. It seemed different out here.

She didn't know that back in the dingy station the operator had dared to say to Rawley Kent in the presence of several loungers, "It's maybe

news the lady won't like," and had received a quick, "That's not for your comment, is it, Spring? You're supposed to be part of your key, not an announcer of what you hear over it."

"Guess that's so," the operator had apologized gruffly, and Rawley had responded, "All right," and received the typed message. He knew the telegrapher wouldn't repeat it to the others after that.

Judith read her message, read it again, then crossed the room to Rawley and laid it in his hand.

"It couldn't be better news," she said, in a warm tone of pleasure.

He read it and, like herself, read it again. It was, to him, the most unexpected news he could have heard. He remained holding it, looking down at it long after he had absorbed its meaning.

I wish to announce to you first of all the fact of my engagement to Eleanor Thorne stop the engagement will not be made public for some time except to a few friends of whom you are chief stop I owe you everything for making the thing possible stop we both send love.

LYLE KENNEDY.

Judith stayed motionless beside him, until at last he gave back the yellow paper and looked at

her. She was looking back at him intently, and her eyes held his.

"I'd like to get this straight in my mind," he said. "Is this actually good news to you?"

"Why not? I did my best to bring it about."

"But—nobody else back East will think so?"

"But what of that if it's the truth? People are easily misled by appearances. To me there haven't been any appearances which should cause a moment's suspicion of my friendship with Lyle Kennedy, but it appears that was the result of my seeing him often. As a matter of fact, I laid a trap to get him out of confirmed bachelorhood—and the trap was sprung by his own incautious foot. I'm as happy about it as—you see!"

He could hardly doubt her. He walked away from her down the long room and back again. Then he paused in front of her.

"Damn that woman!" he said violently.

She knew instantly whom he meant.

"I'm delighted you feel that way about her. I thought you were coming nearer damning me on her account."

"Then you know who's been out here all summer?"

She nodded. "I was told. Is she still here?"

"She went the day before you came."

"Do you mind my asking if you were sorry to see her go?"

"I sent her."

There were a thousand questions in her mind; she wouldn't ask them. More important than to know why Rawley had sent Natalie Vickers away was the knowledge that a new attitude toward herself was appearing. His eyes upon her were searching.

"Judith, she's been nothing to me, but she's given me the devil of a time. When she first came, and I was lonely, I didn't mind having her come over. I wrote you at a moment when I thought that in some weak hour I mightn't be able to hold out against her. I was able—I couldn't lose the thought of you, even though—I thought this man Kennedy——"

He paused. She waited eagerly. But he wouldn't pursue that.

"Then the bishop came. Before that Dave had been actually guarding me from her, though for a long time I didn't know it. I can never forget it. Finally—something happened to me—kept on happening——"

He broke off, stood looking into her eyes with something deepening and darkening in his own.

"Judith, tell me why you came out here."

"Because," she answered, very simply and clearly, "I needed you so much I had to come."

"*Needed* me!"

"Just that. The things I had unconsciously put in place of you didn't satisfy me. One day, Rawley, not long ago, I went in to the apartment, let myself into it alone. I went to your room, looked for something I could find of yours. You'd—taken everything away—I hadn't known that. But after all I found that old orange and brown striped bath gown in the corner of a closet, and I——"

He was so still he seemed not to breathe.

"—I—hid my face in it and tried to smell—bath soap—and cigarettes—to smell something of you—" she laughed shakily—"like a dog that tries for a scent. I thought I did. I hugged the old bath gown. . . . Then—I sent for time-tables and a ticket for Montana."

"Judith!"

The hardness was gone out of him. Instead, in his eyes blazed a clear fire.

"Yes, Rawley. Say it—won't you? You do still want me?"

"*Want* you!"

He put her into a corner of the great couch,

dropped down upon the floor before her, and buried his head in her lap. That was the old Rawley, and she fervently thanked God that there was something of him left. That he wasn't all the self-controlled, cool-headed male he had seemed ever since she had come. Heaving sighs came from him, while she gently stroked his head. Then, bending over him, she breathed:

"May I stay, dear?"

He lifted his head. There had been tears in his eyes—a hot drop or two. He took her hands in his, sprang to his feet, drew her to her own.

"Stay? Not out here with me?"

"You mean to stay here?"

"I've got to. It's the only place for me, for a while. I—can't explain."

He didn't need to; she understood. It was here that he was getting well from the old, long-endured injury to his head. She thought quickly. No, let him keep it his secret till he really wanted to tell her, if it was easier for him that way.

"Don't explain. It's enough for me to know that you want to be here. It's a wonderful place. If I could share it——"

"Winter's coming on. We'd be shut in here for weeks at a time, perhaps. No soft Easterner stays in such a remote spot through the winter.

You couldn't—want to be with me enough to give up all your—all that absorbing life of yours——”

“It hasn't been so absorbing of late.”

It was strange how long he held off from taking her in his arms. Was it because he wanted to be so very, very sure of her? Perhaps, because he had been so deeply burned, he dreaded the fire. Anyhow, he did hold off.

“Listen to me, Judith. If this should be impulse on your part—if I should let you stay here and you got lonely—I couldn't do the thing all over again. It's been increasing hell for me since you first began to get away from me. I wouldn't go through all that again—not again—for——”

“You won't have to go through it. Now, listen to me, my dear. I did love you when I married you—I was gorgeously happy with you for a long time. Then—but you know it all. I had to try all those things and find out that good as they were they weren't enough—in themselves. I know that now. I wasn't as important as I thought I was. Flattery had turned my head, I think. When my illness put me out of it all for three months I discovered the world—my world—hadn't stopped without me. It went swinging right on. And out there at Wild Gull Cove, where Dr. Kennedy

sent me, I found plenty to satisfy my wish to be of use, though there wasn't any limelight there. Oh, if you could know what that stay by the shore did for me—and Lyle Kennedy's friendship."

She caught a protesting sound—a sort of growl—and was glad to hear it! She thought afterward that it was that mention of Kennedy which made her husband at last catch her so fiercely into his arms.

"I know he's done a lot for you," he acknowledged. "And I know he's engaged to somebody else. But I can't—just all at once—get over hating him. If he came in that door this minute—well—I'm fairly quick on the trigger now, and I'd certainly enjoy killing him for all the worry he's caused me."

Neither of them saw Dave open that very door to which Rawley had alluded, hold it half-way for an absorbed minute, then softly close it, grinning happily. He had heard that last sentence.

"Guess we've pretty near made a Westerner of him, judging by them words," he mused. "I don't know who he wants to kill, but I'd help him do it—for her."

Dave, for many months now, had been a devoted member of the Listening Post, Western Branch. He had listened shamelessly, time and again, to find out when he should adopt extreme measures with Mrs. Vickers, of Shepherd's ranch and New York. Time and again he had thwarted her. He had had his share in preserving Rawley Kent for this hour, though Rawley himself would never fully know it.

XXXV

"Love that no longer lives on loveliness."

—LOUIS UNTERMAYER

ALL that has thus far been told of this reunion was but the preliminary to that which gave it its inner fire, welding it into that permanence in such relationships which, unhappily, is all too rare—yet, thank God, not impossible or unknown, though many, out of bitter experience, would deny it even the shadow of an existence. . . . Could those earlier hours be anything but preliminary? . . .

Next morning, leaving their horses, Rawley and Judith Kent sat side by side upon a flat rock in the piercing sunlight, and looked over the magnificent distances, and said the things that meant more than all that had been said before.

"Judith——"

"Yes, Rawley."

"There's something I've got to say to you—and don't know how."

"You've told me only part of the story, dear?"

"I've told you all one side. I'm glad you know now—glad Jerrold told you—glad I could tell you myself a lot more than he ventured to—or knew. But there's still something else."

She watched him, without speaking. There must be something else, for this was neither the old Rawley nor the new one she thought she had found in the West—who was really a composite of old and new. If she could judge by the strange expression on his face, as though he were looking through those distances before him to something far on the other side, this was still another man, whom she didn't yet know at all. She waited, eager, intensely responsive, even before she knew, to whatever might be coming. It was for her, now, to try to understand him to the last fibre of his nature as she never had before.

"Judith, we've had any number of tastes and appreciations and hopes in common—we had them when we were married, didn't we?"

"We surely had."

"Yet we grew apart. We know now the psychological reason, the pathological reason—every sort of reason—for that. We're together once more, as far as all those things are concerned. It looks as though nothing could sep-

arate us again. But—something might—unless . . .”

He fell silent for so long, at the very point where it seemed to her she must have him go on speaking, that she longed to help him. He was staring away from her, seemingly reluctant to say the final word which might be the key to unlock the last reserves, or might prove the barrier to any deeper understanding. She could think of but one thing.

“Is it—children, Rawley? Because now, at last, I’m—oh, so willing, if that’s what you want.”

His eyes came back to her, with a softened, grateful look. “Bless you, dear! That would help—help enormously—as soon as I’m sure I’m absolutely fit. . . . But even that isn’t the ultimate thing I’m trying to get hold of—trying to express.”

She was a little afraid for him, knowing now what a crisis he had been through and not wishing to let him do himself a harm by attempting to make articulate that which came with such difficulty. But she saw he was not to be stayed. He got up and paced up and down for a little, his riding boots crushing the dead twigs under his feet, his hands gripped behind his back,

his sensitive yet strong face and lithe, erect figure the embodiment of a fine virility. Finally he stopped, put one foot upon the rock beside her, clapped his hand down upon his knee, and told her what he had to tell her in words as simple as they were moving. Quietly controlled, with no over-emphasis, Rawley Kent now proved himself.

“Judith, I’ve learned something out here. Partly from our bishop, partly from Dave—though he’d never guess he’d given me anything, good Dave!—partly from just being here, in the mountains, and feeling the enormous contrast between this and the old environment I thought once was so essential. . . . And that’s this: for after all, there’s no use in our tying ourselves up to each other again unless we’ve got something in our grasp that’s bigger than we are and that we hold in common. We’ve got to look at life the same way—we’ve got to have the same motives—and reactions—and ambitions. I can’t describe just what’s got hold of me so tremendously out here, Judy, unless by saying it seems sure to me now we can’t live our lives together at all unless we’re looking for the same fundamental thing. And that’s—the real meaning of life—if one ever can get hold of

that—but anyway, how to make the most of it. The most of it, my dear—*the most of it*. That phrase has such a new significance for me now.”

She was hanging, half breathless, on his words. He had indeed learned something out here, something she would once have thought she already knew but now began to understand she hadn’t.

“The most of it,” he said it again, “but not in the old way—in a new way. As it seems to me now, that nearly everybody—certainly the people we’ve known best, as well as a multitude of others—throw their lives away on just nothing at all. I’ve done enough of that. I want to make every hour count from now on. I don’t know yet just how. I thought I could think that through, this coming winter. Now it looks as though we could think it through together—if you want to. We’ve money enough, time, opportunity. . . . Judy, if we could be one in wanting to *get* somewhere—*do* something—together—that would make it worth while our having been born at all. I want—you can’t know how I want—after all these years of marking time, waiting to get well—to be in the thick of the fight again. Not on committees—not in organizations. . . . Forgive me, Judy——”

He looked at her with a sudden sharp momentary remorse. But she took that quietly.

"I understand. Those organizations have to be—they have their place—they couldn't possibly be spared. . . . But—other people can do that work."

"Other people can. But you and I—we can find something, I know we can, that means personal, individual service—to—*one poor devil at a time*. You can't take them in lumps, Judith—you have to take them one at a time. As the bishop took me—as Dave took me—as even these mountains took me."

"And as you're taking me now, Rawley." She was on her feet, an instantaneous, splendid comprehension of her husband's new quality of thought and purpose sweeping over her. "I do understand—I do—what's happened to you. You're making it happen to me. I do understand—I do. . . . And I'm with you, to the last drop of my life."

He put his hands on her shoulders and gave her long look for long look.

XXXVI

*Let's end this where we began—with the Listening Post.
How better? What should we have done without it? There
would have been only half a story—if any at all*

To

WILLIAM BRENNAN
Wild Gull Cove

Meet us Rocky Mountain Limited Grand Central Tuesday eight thirty A.M. Have everything ready for stay of fortnight at present place.

RAWLEY KENT.

"I'll see 'em first," triumphed Brennan. He stood erect and fine in his dark livery, his cap at precisely the natty angle he liked to wear it in the kitchen, though he knew it must be set straight upon his head before he presented himself to the scrutiny of his employers.

"I wish I could go," mourned Molly. "But hurry them out here, Billy—promise!"

"Orders is orders. You weren't mentioned. You ought to be satisfied to be on the doorstep, you and Martha, bowin' and scrapin' like you will be. I'm the one that'll step up and give 'em

their first welcome. You bet I'll know from the first look if they're back to fight it out in the divorce courts or settle down to hold hands on that couch in there, crazy about each other, the way they used to be. What are you bettin' it'll be?"

Nobody had known. If squeezing the blood out of a telegram by reading it twenty times over would have done it, the Listening Post would have been fully informed. All they did know was that just before Brennan started to drive into town a great box of flowers, of the same size and from the same place that numberless other cardless boxes had come during the past months, more than suggested that Dr. Kennedy was giving somebody a welcome home. Did he know he was welcoming two people?

Anyhow, they would all soon know. But Brennan himself was more or less puzzled, after all. When he saw them coming up the long station ramp, followed by two red-caps, there was no way to tell, really. They had always been so carefully restrained in manner, in public, they seemed at first glance precisely as they had always seemed. But no—as they came nearer—hey!—was that Mr. Rawley Kent, that tanned, lean-faced, vigorous-looking young man, who

strode along at such a pace that his wife could hardly keep up with him? Where were his stick, his stroll, his slightly languid aspect of indifference to all about him? And *she*—she *was* keeping pace with him, and her eyes, at sight of Brennan, standing at attention behind the ropes, struck him as the eyes of a girl eager for whatever might be awaiting her. Yes, there was a difference in them both, whatever it might mean.

“How are you, Brennan? Knew we should find you at this exact spot. Everybody well?”

“Fine, sir, thank you.” Brennan felt more like a first-class chauffeur than he had since Mr. Kent had gone away. His back was straighter, his manner more correct. He knew how Mr. Kent liked things. He had never had such a grip from his master’s hand at meeting. Didn’t know he *could* take hold like that.

He led the way to the waiting car, put them in, spread the monogrammed robe over their knees—it was a cold morning for early November, almost snow in the air. As he took his own place he noticed that Mr. Kent had put his portion of the robe aside. Well, he looked as though he didn’t need to be coddled. Montana must have been good for him.

The glass screen between himself and the

Kents was tightly closed, though their windows were open. But that way he couldn't hear them. He did, however, out of the tail of his eye, in his driving mirror, catch just one glance between them which to his experienced powers of observation told the whole story. The motor was, at the moment, passing a certain impressive-looking old church—the church, according to Molly—Brennan hadn't been in their service then—where they had been married. Well, if they felt like looking at it now, together, that was all there was about it. Brennan sped the car on faster. He was eager to be in the kitchen, with the others of the Listening Post, giving out the news. He had got it first!

The time did come, at last, when he was free to talk things over with Martha and Molly. Martha, after receiving satisfying greetings from the master and mistress, had nearly broken her neck, according to Brennan, to get up a superb luncheon for the travellers. Molly had secretly shown a cheap little engagement ring, worn on a ribbon inside her dress, to Mrs. Kent, and been warmly congratulated. Matt, it seemed, had gone away just after Judith's departure. But he was coming back some day—not so far away. Dr. Kennedy had found him a chance to play in a

small up-state orchestra, and if he satisfied he would be taken on in a bigger one, in the city, if Dr. Kennedy could bring it about. Molly knew he could.

Luncheon over, the Kents, in rough tweeds, had gone down to walk along the shore of Wild Gull Cove together. The sky was gray, the wind half a gale. Not much like Mr. Rawley, to be acting so like a boy who loves to be out in the wind. The houses along the beach were all closed. Rawley had caught his wife's hand, and they were all but running down the wind, laughing. Judith wore a scarlet scarf about her neck—it flew out behind her like wings.

The Listening Post, in a body, other duties neglected, stood watching them from the dining-room windows.

"Oh, I *am* so pleased!" cried Molly. "Look at them! Anybody'd know they're happy."

"I reckon they are," Martha admitted with a sigh. "It makes you glad and sad both to see people wild about each other like that."

Brennan hurled the bomb he had been keeping behind him. "They're going back to Montana."

"What!"

"How do you know?"

He made a gesture with his head toward the well-known place of vantage, the glassed doors, hung with blue silk, which opened into the dining room.

"You get to know more than anybody else, Billy Brennan!" cried Molly. "Seems like you're always tiptoeing round."

Brennan laughed.

He had forgotten, for this happy hour, his grudge against Molly. After all, there were other girls in the world. He had met one a week ago. She was a wonder!

"I guess most people listen when they get a chance, when there's something interesting to hear," he philosophized. "*You* should accuse me of listening more than *you* do!"

"Everybody listens," agreed Martha stoically. "Some do it to be mean. We've done it because we liked 'em. I guess we haven't hurt 'em. Lord, it was a sight for sore eyes to see 'em come walkin' in together!"

"I can't get used to it yet," sighed Molly. Her fingers touched the little cheap ring, feeling it through her dress. She and Judith Kent weren't so far apart after all.



